



# HANDBOOK

for social & educational work  
with Roma and Sinti youth

**Erasmus+**

Project N. KA210-YOU-4AD4B8BB



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Erasmus+ Project KA210-YOU-4AD4B8BB

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**Caritas**

Diocesi Bolzano-Bressanone  
Diözese Bozen-Brixen  
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## enROMyou: THE PROJECT

The project *enROMyou* (Enhancing Roma Youth Work) was developed to create a space of exchange between youth workers from different NGOs already working with Roma, in order to promote a better understanding of cultural differences, traditions, values and needs.

The main goals the project aimed to achieve are the following:

- **To promote intercultural understanding and improve the quality of youth work with Roma and Sinti;**
- **To facilitate discussion and analysis of existing methods, experiences, and challenges among youth workers** (both Roma and non-Roma from different organizations and countries);
- **To strengthen the social skills of youth workers:** through targeted workshops, participants are better equipped to identify and respond appropriately to the specific needs of Roma and Sinti communities;
- **To foster social inclusion:** the project identified existing barriers and developed best practices in order to improve the inclusion of Roma and Sinti in educational institutions, healthcare systems, and the labor market;
- **To build sustainable partnerships:** the project encouraged cooperation among social services, NGOs, educational institutions, and Roma representatives to ensure long-term support and collaboration;
- **To raise awareness of Roma culture and history:** project's activities aimed to address the current needs of the target group and contribute to greater public understanding.

## TARGET

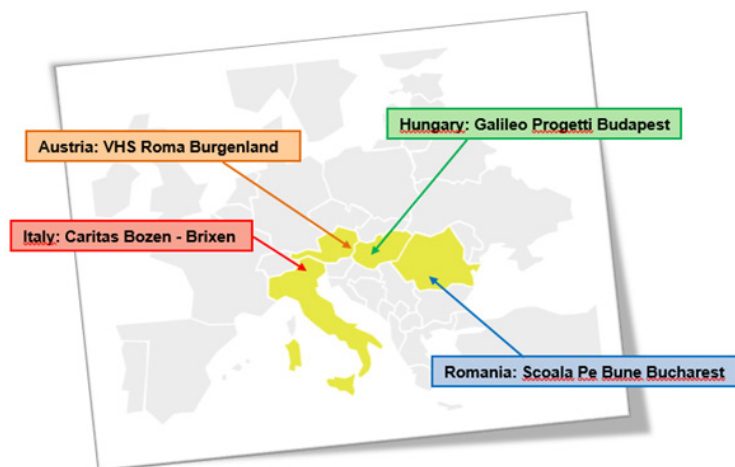
The project had three target groups:

- young Roma from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
- professional youth and social workers;
- organizations working with the Roma community.

Youth workers are constantly confronted with new challenges in their daily work, currently for example by the influx of Roma war refugees from Ukraine or Roma refugees from balkan countries, who need special attention and care due to traumatic experiences, or the aftermath of the Corona pandemic. Often, Roma youth come from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and face discrimination and stigma in their daily lives, whether at school, at work, or in everyday life. Youth workers are faced with mental health and psychological issues of their target groups. Often there is a lack of appropriate support systems as well as innovative methods. For this reason the partner organizations not only evaluated and shared their knowledge and experience within the partner consortium, but

also made the project outcome available in the form of this handbook, in order to reach a broad public and professional colleagues and to strengthen them in their work. With this outcome we want to create a knowledge base about the needs and wishes of Roma youth on the one hand, and appropriate and tested methods and new approaches in dealing with their concerns and problems on the other hand.

## PARTNERS



### Austria: Roma VHS



Roma Volkshochschule Burgenland (Roma VHS) works with minority communities — primarily with members of Austria's autochthonous Roma and Sinti populations — as well as with people with migration biographies and refugees. We are active in both youth and adult education, and our work includes cultural activities, training programs, cultural and memorial initiatives.

Our aim is to develop educational programs for all those interested in Romani culture(s) and language(s), and to foster mutual understanding, dialogue and exchange between Roma, non-Roma, other minority groups and the majority population.

With many years of experience in educational counselling for minorities and people with migrant backgrounds in Austria, we have encountered persistent issues such as hate speech, discrimination and stigmatization — and have, in response, developed a high level of counselling and intercultural competence.

In our daily work, we face complex challenges — particularly in working with minorities,

who often experience structural exclusion and stigmatization from the majority society. For many years, we have been committed to improving this situation through inclusive educational and awareness-raising initiatives.

Our target groups include social workers, educators, teachers, trainers, project leaders, stakeholders and policy makers who work with minority groups, individuals of Roma heritage, as well as members of the majority population who are interested in intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

**Website:** <https://www.vhs-roma.eu/>

### **Hungary: Galileo Progetti Nonprofit Kft.**



Galileo contributes to inclusion policies, quality of education and upbringing, youth participation and active citizenship, economy and social entrepreneurship in Hungary and Europe. Galileo contributes also to the Lifelong Learning model, focusing on European citizenship education, youth policies, pre-school education, social

and work inclusion, equal opportunities. Main target groups are vulnerable groups, such as Roma and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and at risk of social exclusion. Another important target are educators and administrators of scholastic and extra-curricular institutions. Galileo has been working for more than 10 years on non-formal learning and training experiences and European preparation programs involving young people, in particular belonging to disadvantaged groups, thanks to the Erasmus+ mobility program. Galileo works to increase local development, skills and the quality of education of young people and adults through the exchange of good practices, the sharing and adaptation of processes and models, cooperation and professional debate. Galileo's mission is to fight discrimination, support the employment, social and civil inclusion of all people, respect for rights and strengthen freedom of thought and expression in every context.

Galileo has promoted learning opportunities for VET (Vocational Education and Training) learners, teachers, staff since 2011, in cooperation with Hungarian VET providers and enterprises in Europe, providing mobility experiences for hundreds of learners (mostly belonging to disadvantaged groups), teachers and staff.

**Website:** <https://galileoprogetti.hu/language/en/home-english/>

### **Italy: Caritas Bozen-Brixen/Bolzano-Bressanone**



Diocesi Bolzano-Bressanone  
Diočese Bozen-Brixen  
Dieceja Baisan-Porsenù

Caritas, as a religious foundation, raises citizens' awareness of social issues and builds networks of solidarity to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged people in society.

The main objectives of Caritas are to promote social inclusion and solidarity and to promote social justice by promoting the values of equality, fraternity

and solidarity between people of different social and cultural backgrounds and by seeking to remove the barriers that people have to overcome because of their social, cultural and economic conditions. Caritas aims to encourage young people to reflect on issues such as justice, active citizenship, social justice, poverty, etc. and to raise awareness of social commitment, social responsibility and solidarity among young people by promoting volunteering.

Our main mission is to support people in difficult circumstances.

*Intercultural Mediation Service* of Caritas supports minors and youth in their school career. Intercultural Mediation is structured with the aim of intervening at local level alongside families of Roma and Sinti origin (most of whom are still living in socially and economically disadvantaged conditions) and operates mainly in the social and educational spheres. Nowadays, Roma (of recent Balkan origin) and Sinti (who have been present for centuries) minorities living in the province of Bolzano seem to have equal living and schooling conditions and a good degree of social interaction. However, the situation of many families reveals an initial gap, which actually prevents people belonging to these minorities from fully benefiting from this apparent integration and from having the same opportunities in the future.

**Website:** <https://caritas.bz.it/it/index.html>


## Romania: Scoala Pe Bune



*Scoala Pe Bune* specializes in tailored educational programs, therapy, and counseling for children and young adults, prioritizing non-formal education methods that emphasize interactive learning and problem-solving. The goal is to develop not just academic knowledge but also critical thinking, creativity, and interpersonal skills through hands-on experiences and group discussions.

Beyond academics, they are dedicated to creating opportunities for underprivileged children by connecting them to support networks, including potential job prospects and international experiences through Erasmus programs. They also maintain strong communication with parents and caregivers to ensure the overall well-being of at-risk children. A distinctive aspect of their work involves actively children and young adults in their NGO's administration, fostering mentorship and empowering disadvantaged youth through diverse programs to create a lasting impact and a brighter future.

The team's engagement with at-risk children, many of whom hail from disadvantaged backgrounds, including a significant number from the Roma community, equips the NGO with valuable tools and methods tailored to this specific demographic. The team members also possess expertise in data processing, conducting research, and data analysis. In Bucharest and surroundings, where our activity takes place, the primary focus is



providing assistance to children and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure they receive a proper education and achieve success in life. With this mission in mind, the main beneficiaries targeted by the organization fall within the 12-25 age group. However, our activities also involve a diverse group of specialists who extend beyond this age group but play a crucial role in reaching and assisting the beneficiaries. These specialists require thorough briefing and training due to the unique challenges associated with working with at-risk youth.

**Website:** <https://www.scoalapebune.ro/>

## ROMA AND SINTI IN EDUCATION AND WORK.

### The European context

This chapter presents general statistical data that help visualize the situation of the Roma minority in Europe and highlight the very strong discrepancy compared to the condition of the non-Roma European population.

The sources of these data are the reports and publications held by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Commission, offering insights into the living conditions of Roma populations, highlighting the disparities between Roma and non-Roma populations in the EU (see attached Sources).

In particular, we refer to the report ***Roma in 10 European countries***, published on 25 October 2022 by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The report presents the results of the Roma Survey, carried out in 2021 in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, together with North Macedonia and Serbia (countries that together represent around 87% of the Roma population in the EU). The results derived from 8,000 respondents, covering up to 28,000 people and focused on the EU Strategy's targets.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and its periodic reports have consistently demonstrated that **Roma are among the people who are most vulnerable to human rights violations in the European Union**, the long-lasting effects of anti-gypsyism and the problems many Roma face in enjoying their fundamental rights regarding employment, education, healthcare and housing.

Despite EU's and Member States' efforts and initiatives aimed at reducing disadvantages and discrimination suffered by Roma minorities, data show that the results are limited and uneven. **The situation of Roma and of young Roma, in Europe remains dire, with persistent challenges in education, employment, health and housing, that continue to hinder their social inclusion and equal opportunities.**

When reading the following analysis, some general notes should be taken into consideration:

- We must point out that the term "Roma" is used as an umbrella term, according to



the definition of the Council of Europe (2012, *Descriptive glossary of terms related to Roma issues, Strasbourg*). It encompasses Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari, Balkan Egyptians and Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); groups such as Travellers, Yenish and the populations designated under the administrative term *Gens du voyage*; and people who identify themselves as Gypsies.

- There are not many specific analyses on the Roma youth population, apart from statistical data on education. For this reason, the data sometimes refer to the entire population.
- The data represent a statistic, carried out in 10 European countries (plus Serbia and Macedonia) as regards FRA, and in the 27 European countries as regards the Union data.
- The data are not very up to date, they refer mainly to the period 2021-2022, but they are the most recent available.
- Referring to the project partner countries, the FRA report includes Italy, Romania and Hungary (because they have a high percentage of Roma population) but not Austria.

We report some main data from the last **FRA report** (see Source 1.):

About **housing**, the data are quite worrying:

- 80 % of Roma surveyed are at risk of poverty, compared to the EU non-Roma population average of 17 %;
- 22% live in households without running water and 33% do not have an indoor toilet;
- 29% of Roma children live in households where a member of the family went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month.

However, compared to the FRA survey in 2016, there are some improvements because the number of Roma living in substandard housing decreased from 61% in 2016 to 52%.

Regarding **education**, according to FRA and Roma for Europe reports, the disparities are evident:

- 44% of Roma children attend early childhood education, the European average is around 93%;
- 7% of Roma children under 16 are not in compulsory education, because their families cannot afford to send them or they are blocked by a lack of documentation required for enrollment;
- Among individuals aged 20-24, only 27% of Roma students complete upper secondary education while, in 2023, the European Union rate was 84.1%;
- As of 2023, approximately 43.1% of individuals aged 25–34 in the European Union had completed tertiary education. Among Roma, only 1%;
- In terms of school segregation in compulsory school, more than half of Roma children aged 6-15 (52%) are in segregated schools where all or most schoolmates are Roma, the average was 44% in 2016.

About **employment**, the report says that only two out of five Roma aged 20-64 (43%) are in paid work, when in 2021 the average employment rate in the EU was 73.1%.

Hungary and Italy have reached the EU target of at least 60 %. In the employment sector, the gap between men and women is enormous: only 28% of Roma women aged 20–64 were in employment, in comparison with 58% of Roma men.

Regarding the **impact of anti-gypsyism and discrimination**, the FRA research reports that 25% of Roma (one in four on average in the 10 countries) felt discriminated against in the last year in everyday situations such as looking for a job, at work, regarding access to housing, health care or education.

This trend is not improving over time, anti-gypsyism remains constant in almost all countries and is even lower in some of them compared to 2016:

- one in five Roma children experienced hate-motivated bullying/harassment at school;
- every third Roma older than 16 (33 %) felt discriminated against because of being Roma when looking for a job. On average, the number doubled in comparison to 2016 (from 16 %);
- 30% of Roma parents report that their children are verbally harassed at school due to their ethnic background.

The reporting rate of discrimination experienced is very low: only 5% of Roma report cases of discrimination. This data is much lower than in 2016, when the rate was 16%.

In terms of **health**, there is a clear difference in life expectancy between the Roma population and the general population: Roma women and men live between 9 and 11 years less than the general population in the countries participating in the survey.

Some specific data about **Roma youth**:

Every second Roma aged 16-24 (56 %) was a NEET, when the EU average in the European Union was 13.1%. The data related to Roma NEETs show an important gender difference: 69% of young Roma women compared to 44% of young Roma men.

Younger respondents report higher rates of hate speech and discrimination in the media than those aged 65 and older.

## Education

Indicator	Roma in EU	Non-Roma (General Population) in EU
Enrollment in early childhood education (ages 3 to school age)	44%	~93%
Early school leaving (ages 18–24)	71%	~10%
Completion of upper secondary education	~20%	~85%
Completion of tertiary education	<1%	~40%

## Employment and NEET Rates (Ages 16–24)

Indicator	Roma in EU	Non-Roma
NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training)	56%	11%
Employment rate (Adults)	43%	72%

## Living Conditions

Indicator	Roma in EU	Non-Roma
At risk of poverty	80%	17%
Overcrowded households	78–94%	~17%
No access to tap water in home	24%	~1%
Severe material deprivation	50%	~7%

## Discrimination and Social Inclusion

Indicator	Roma in EU	Non-Roma
Experienced discrimination in past 12 months	41%	~10%
Trust in public institutions	Significantly low	High
Perceived harassment at school (Roma children)	~30% (parents reporting)	Not widely reported

## METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE: the survey

During the kick-off meeting, the partners developed and compiled around 50 questions for a survey, to be submitted to young people aged between 13 and 30. Since enROMyou is not a large project, the survey was intentionally designed on a small scale, for a number of participants ranging from 15 to 25 interviewees for each partner country.

In total, 75 surveys were proposed and answered, with the following number of answers:

Austria	17
Hungary	15
Italy	21
Romania	22

The aim of the survey was to “give young Roma and Sinti a voice” about their current living conditions, their sense of identity and, last but not least, their hopes and dreams for the future. The macro-themes covered were therefore:

1. AREA OF PERSONAL DATA: age, gender, education level, occupation, living context, identity
2. AREA OF EDUCATION AND WORK: worth of education, integration, career opportunities, needs, suggestions
3. AREA OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION: awareness and opinions about institutions, social participation
4. AREA OF TRUST AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: trust and political activity
5. AREA OF DISCRIMINATION: felt or experienced direct discrimination
6. AREA OF OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION: life satisfaction, hopes and dreams

To read the whole survey, see attached document.

The questions included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, depending on the topic covered, with the intention of leaving young people as much freedom of expression as possible, without the survey being too long or cumbersome.

The methodology employed for data collection combines direct one-to-one on paper interviews, CAPI (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing), CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) and SAQ (Self-Administered Questionnaire answering, for youngsters aged 24 years or older).

The interviewer (when present) ensured that respondents fully understood each question, providing clarification as needed. All data collection was confidential, with no personal data being collected, ensuring respondent anonymity. All answers were carefully reviewed and cleaned, in order to eliminate typographical errors or other human mistakes, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the data for analysis.

## NATIONAL SURVEY'S EVALUATION

# AUSTRIA

## LOCAL CONTEXT

The Burgenland Roma are one of the six officially recognized autochthonous ethnic groups in Austria and have lived primarily in the southeast of the country, especially in Burgenland, for centuries. With an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 members, they represent the smallest recognized minority in Austria.

In contrast, a much larger group consists of non-autochthonous (non-autochthonous) Roma from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, who have migrated to Austria over the past decades. Today, they live mainly in Vienna and its surrounding areas, and are estimated to number around 30,000 people. This group differs from the Burgenland Roma not only in terms of language (speaking various Roma dialects) and cultural backgrounds, but also in terms of legal status, as they are not recognized as an official minority under Austrian law. The same applies to the Sinti.

This lack of legal recognition has significant consequences: non-recognized groups are often excluded from specific minority rights and protections, such as those outlined in the Minority School Act, and from various support mechanisms available to recognized minorities.

The situation is further complicated by intercultural tensions within the Roma communities themselves. In many cases, it is young people who suffer most - both from these internal divisions and from widespread everyday racism.

In the Austrian part of the survey, special attention was therefore paid to ensuring an inclusive and balanced approach, reflecting the perspectives of both autochthonous and non-autochthonous Roma youth.

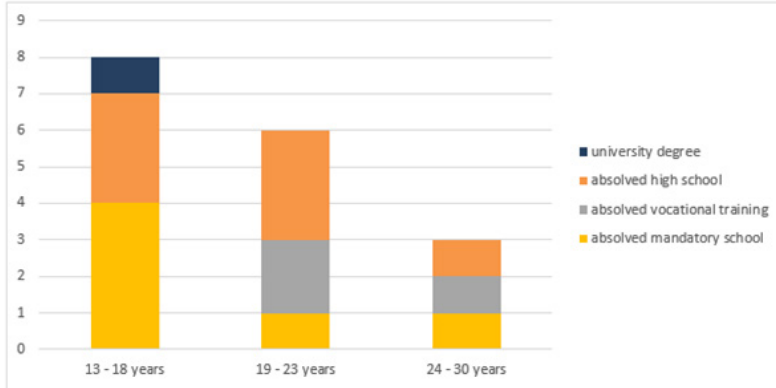
## SURVEYS RESULTS

### The interviews

A total of 17 Roma and Sinti youth from Burgenland and Vienna participated in the survey (7 female, 10 male). This composition broadly reflects the demographic reality and includes both autochthonous and non-autochthonous members of the Roma and Sinti communities.

Most respondents live in urban areas and report a general satisfaction with their living conditions, citing factors such as stability, access to basic services, and a diverse and dynamic social environment.

Seven of the 17 participants hold a high school diploma, two have completed university degrees, and the remaining eight are still in compulsory education or vocational training. However, some respondents noted that economic inequality and discrimination continue to pose significant challenges for Roma in Austria. Access to affordable housing in particular remains problematic for those with low incomes, as discriminatory attitudes among landlords can still be a barrier to securing rental housing.



## Occupation and Satisfaction

Discrimination remains a significant barrier, particularly in schools and in the workplace. Many Roma students experience prejudice from both teachers and peers, which can lead to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. The survey also reveals that stereotyping occurs not only in the classroom but also on the labor market. Nevertheless, 9 out of 17 respondents stated that they are satisfied with their current occupation (including school attendance). Six did not respond, and two answered “no” explicitly. Gender-based discrimination also plays a role, as Roma women often face additional challenges in male-dominated professions.

## Identity and Visibility

Some respondents report that they are proud of their ethnic group affiliation, while others face prejudice and discrimination that prevent them from openly identifying as Roma. Roma identity is primarily shaped by factors such as family background, cultural heritage, appearance, and language. The latter factor is interesting in that only around 30% (5 out of 17) of respondents say they speak Romani at least “a little” or “very well.” Allochthones groups, especially in Vienna, are more likely to speak the Romani dialects of their respective countries of origin. In Burgenland, however, there has been a negative trend for years, with

fewer and fewer young people speaking or learning Romani, a situation that also applies to the two other recognized minorities in Burgenland, Hungarians and Croats. The decline in the use of Romani is a worrying trend, as the minority language spoken is not only a crucial part of cultural identity, but also fundamental to maintaining the status of a recognized minority. (Already existing) countermeasures, such as language courses and cultural programs organized by associations, could help reverse this trend, provided that the youth are willing to do so.

## **School and Work context**

The biggest challenges in education and the job include:

- Stereotyping and discrimination by teachers and peers;
- Lack of social awareness about Roma culture and history;
- Insufficient financial resources for higher education;
- Limited access to mentors and role models from the Roma community.

Participants suggest several measures to improve educational opportunities for Roma students. These include, above all, the implementation of specific learning content on Roma history and culture in school curricula. One participant mentions that “teachers should finally know the difference between Romanian, Romans and Roma”! Furthermore, more empathy and inclusion on the part of teachers and greater involvement of parents are called for. In addition, financial aid programs and specific training and awareness courses for teachers could help create a more inclusive learning environment. Better support services, scholarships, or financial aid for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and students are also called for.

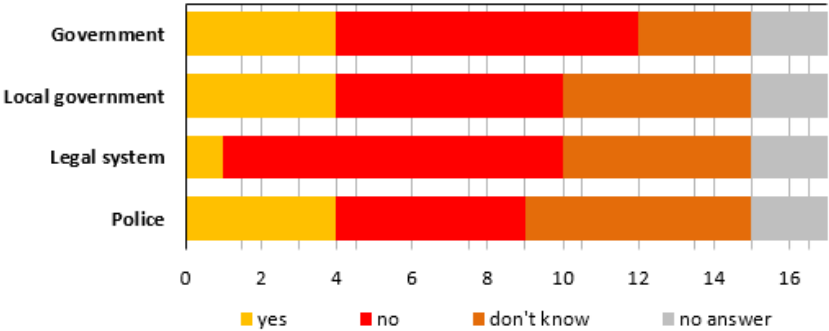
## **Social, cultural and political Participation**

Only two of the 17 respondents stated that their circle of friends mainly consists of members of the Roma community. The majority have a circle of friends consisting mainly of non-Roma or did not give a clear answer. Only four people have heard of activities or programs for Roma youth, including Erasmus+ and the project “Prado Drom.” Ten respondents had participated in workshops or courses organized by Roma organizations and initiatives, which suggests a certain level of interest and engagement among young people in the community. Nine of the respondents believe that initiatives and programs for Roma youth can have a positive impact on the community, including “building trust”, “strengthening the community” and “making the Roma community more visible in the public and social sphere”. The result is sobering, as only two people are actively involved in organizations and actively participate in social or cultural programs for the community. According to some respondents, one of the reasons for this is apparently that Roma NGOs are seen

as ineffective or self-serving. There are also complaints that men often dominate in higher positions and that the organizations do not always understand and reflect the needs of the community. It is suggested that more workshops and activities specifically tailored to the needs of Roma youth be offered. The visibility of the community in society should also be increased.

Trust

A significant proportion of respondents express skepticism toward political institutions and leaders. This mistrust leads to low political engagement and limited participation in community-based initiatives.



More than half of respondents, around 53%, say they do not actively participate in events, social work, Roma organizations, or politics. This lack of social and political participation stems from a history of marginalization and exclusion, which has led many Roma to believe that their voices are neither heard nor valued in political decision-making processes. To promote greater political participation, respondents suggest implementing initiatives that foster civic engagement and leadership development in Roma communities. Education programs that offer political literacy and advocacy training could empower Roma youth, individually and subsequently institutionally, to take a more active role in shaping policies and structures that directly affect their lives. In addition, greater representation of Roma in political bodies, particularly at the local and regional levels for example (e.g., as municipal councilors) could help build trust between the Roma communities with political institutions and the broader society.



## Discrimination

Nine out of 17 respondents (~53%) report discrimination in various areas of their daily lives. The most commonly reported forms of discrimination include verbal insults, offensive comments, hostile stares, and offensive gestures. These negative experiences not only contribute to an individual sense of exclusion but also reinforce stereotyping of Roma in general. These forms of antigypsyism are particularly prevalent in the areas of education, employment, and access to public services. To combat discrimination, respondents emphasize the need for stronger anti-discrimination legislation, more consistent enforcement of existing regulations, and awareness campaigns that promote tolerance and diversity.

## Life Satisfaction

Most respondents believe that their living conditions are better than or the same as those of their parents. The best aspects of their lives are often mentioned as family/friends, freedom and dreams, mental and physical health, passions and hobbies, and success at work/school.

## Wishes, Hopes and Dreams

Respondents cite several priorities that shape their hopes for the future. The majority emphasize the importance of personal freedom and the opportunity to realize their dreams, such as living in Vienna or traveling to other countries. Strong family ties and close friendships are also valued as essential components of a fulfilling life. In addition, respondents are committed to social justice, and several interviewees say they want to contribute to efforts to eliminate poverty, reduce discrimination against Roma, and improve access to education. When asked about their long-term goals, many respondents express a desire for a world without racism, where Roma are recognized and respected as equal members of society. They hope for more opportunities for Roma youth, better access to quality education, and the removal of systemic barriers that have historically marginalized their community.

## BEST PRACTICES

### **Empowerment through encounters, education, and creativity: The federal youth meeting “Oppe Heroes”**

In Austria, currently, there is no nationwide structured youth work program for Roma and Sinti. Nevertheless, there are significant civil society initiatives that are fostering groundbreaking impetus for empowerment, political education, and remembrance work. One outstanding example is the Federal Youth Meeting of Austrian Roma and Sinti, which

took place in Burgenland in 2016 under the title “Opre Heroes” and was organized by Romano Centro.

The five-day meeting brought together young Roma from Vienna, Styria, and Burgenland to discuss topics such as identity, history, antiziganism, and political participation. The innovative concept combined non-formal educational approaches with creative methods and a positive self-image: the participants were encouraged to see themselves as heroes of their own stories.

Key program elements included:

- A “Romanes crash course” in which music, texts, and songs were used to create a low-threshold approach to the language
- Workshops on antiziganism, in which terms such as “Roma,” “Sinti,” and “Gypsies” were critically examined
- Role-playing and biographical work with Holocaust survivors, such as the Hungarian Roma József Forgács
- Creative workshops on “Roma superheroes” from comics and real-life resistance, which culminated in an exhibition
- Hate speech analysis and examination of stereotypes in music videos, including media work as part of the “No Hate Speech” campaign

Despite limited resources and a small group size (13 participants), the project was highly effective: it promoted self-confidence, critical thinking, cultural knowledge, and digital literacy. Participants were encouraged to see themselves as active shapers of their society. “Opre Heroes” is an example of how political education, empowerment, and cultural identity can intertwine. It also shows how important it is that Roma youth work is led and shaped by Roma themselves – in a participatory, creative, and self-determined way.

### **Community-based culture of remembrance: the memorial ceremony on August 2**

An important example of self-organized culture of remembrance is the annual memorial ceremony on August 2 at Ceija Stojka Square in Vienna. Since 2015, Roma and Sinti murdered under National Socialism have been commemorated there under the motto “Dikh he na bister” (“Look and don’t forget”). This initiative was launched by young Roma and Sinti and is aimed in particular at the younger generation. The event includes personal speeches, music, and symbolic acts such as lighting candles to create a dignified space for remembrance. The commemoration ceremony has not only contributed to the visibility of the Roma community, but has also had political impact: in January 2023, August 2 was unanimously recognized by the Austrian National Council as a national day of remembrance for the genocide of Roma and Sinti. The event also supports the implementation of a

central memorial in Vienna to commemorate the murdered Romani women and men, which has been demanded since 2015. This self-organized memorial event impressively demonstrates how young Roma and Sinti are contributing to the recognition of their history and the strengthening of their community through their own initiative and commitment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the most encouraging findings of the survey is that a relatively high proportion of respondents have completed higher education, including high school diploma. This suggests that many people are achieving educational success despite the challenges facing the Roma community. Another notable result is that some Roma in Austria are open about their identity, in contrast to Roma communities in other countries, where individuals often feel compelled to hide their background for fear of discrimination. This openness can be attributed to increased awareness and efforts to promote Roma culture and identity. However, there are still areas of concern. The Roma language is in danger of dying out, as only a small percentage of respondents actively speak it. In addition, political alienation remains an urgent issue, as many Roma feel disconnected from political processes and institutions. The main barriers to education and employment are not primarily a lack of skills, but to persistent discrimination and a general lack of knowledge about Roma culture in society.

The Austrian survey highlights both progress and continuing challenges within the Roma community. **While higher educational attainment and cultural awareness are positive developments, discrimination, political alienation, and the decline in the use of the Romani language remain critical issues that require attention.** Addressing these challenges **through targeted educational reforms, community support programs, and policy changes** is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

Future efforts should focus on:

- **expanding access to higher education;**
- **integrating Roma culture and history into mainstream education and media;**
- **empowering Roma individuals and communities to take an active role in political and social life.**

By implementing these measures, Austria can work toward a society in which Roma are fully integrated and have equal opportunities to thrive.

# HUNGARY

## LOCAL CONTEXT

### Sinti and Roma in Hungary

In Hungary, Sinti marginal groups are considered part of the larger Romani community, which includes the Kalderash, Lovari, and other.

The Romani population in Hungary is diverse, with various subgroups and varying degrees of integration into Hungarian society.

The Hungarian **Roma population**, estimated at 876,000 individuals or more than 8% of the overall population, **is the country's largest minority group**. State policies aimed at the Roma population have existed for decades, addressing a wide range of complex issues such as housing, employment, education, and health. The "Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2020-2030" (HNSIS) attempts to base its intervention areas and values on the "EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030". It addresses **the Roma community as part of Hungary's most deprived population**. This broad policy approach to Roma inclusion impedes evaluators and independent stakeholders from truly learning about the effectiveness of approaches and hinders their monitoring and assessment of the results in significant ways. Roma communities face conditions of poverty, discrimination and very strong segregation.

#### Living conditions:

- Around 60% of Roma live in segregated rural settlements or ghettos, often lacking piped water, sewage systems, or reliable electricity.

#### Education:

- ~45% of Roma students attend segregated schools or classrooms composed mostly of Roma children, reinforcing systemic disadvantages.
- Nearly 4 in 5 Roma adults have completed only primary education, compared to less than 20% of non-Roma.
- Early school dropout remains high: over 64% of Roma youth leave school prematurely.
- Only 25% of Roma youth finish secondary school, compared to 75% of the general population.
- Some progress is seen in kindergarten-level integration.

#### Employment:

- Roma employment rates are consistently 25–30 percentage points lower than those of non-Roma.
- Roma women are especially affected, with an employment rate of just 35.8%, compared to 58.9% for Roma men.

- More than 20% of Roma households have no employed members.
- Employed Roma are often confined to low-skill public sector jobs or temporary contracts.

### Health:

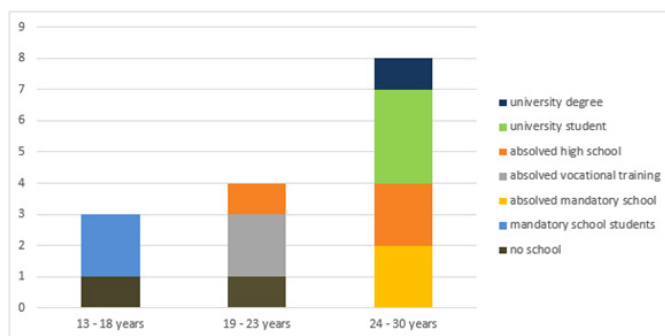
- Roma infant mortality rates are approximately four times higher than those of non-Roma.
- In segregated settlements, life expectancy among Roma is estimated to be 10–15 years shorter than the national average.

## SURVEYS RESULTS

### The interviews

A total of 15 Roma youth from Budapest and surroundings were interviewed (9 females and 6 males):

- 3 (all males) aged between 13 and 18,
- 4 (3 M and 1 F) aged between 19 and 23,
- 8 (all females) aged between 24 and 30.



The educational level, divided pro age range, looks as it follows: Among the 14 (on 15) respondents, 10 live in big cities, 3 in Medium-sized cities and 1 in a village. Basically, everyone is satisfied with where they live. Those who live in cities, large or medium-sized, are satisfied with access to services and friends and opportunities.

### Occupation and Satisfaction

Among the 12 people who responded, only one was not satisfied, regardless of the type of employment. From this answer, it can be deduced that almost everyone was able to find a job at least not unsatisfactory, which reflects the perception that in Hungary, when the questionnaire was made, there was sufficient job offer.



## Identity and Visibility

Among the 14 respondents

- 10 residents of big city (Budapest),
- 3 in Medium-sized cities and
- 1 in a village.

Basically, everyone is satisfied with where they live. Those who live in cities, large or medium-sized, are satisfied with access to services and friends and opportunities.

They define their identity as a member of the Roma community through their family. Several youngsters point out that they identify as Hungarian of Roma ethnicity.

Only 2 respondents speak a Roma language (Oláh Gypsy and Lovari). The sense of identity is very individual, in fact some people declare themselves proud of it, while others specify to be of Roma ethnicity but do not belong to the community, as well as to refuse stereotypes and encourage other members of the community in this sense.

## School and Work context

The analysis of answers shows that 9 out of 15 respondents have a qualification higher than the mandatory school, while 6 have only the mandatory school or neither. Therefore, 36% do not have a qualification, which is three times higher than the national average of 2024, which is 11.6%.

These 36% are considered “Early school leavers”: young people aged 18–24 who have a primary school education or lower and do not participate in any education either within or outside the school system.

To delve deeper into the topic of integration at school and early school leaving, more specific questions were asked. To the question: “In your opinion, what makes education difficult for Roma children?” two main obstacles emerged:

- discrimination by certain teachers and in some cases by fellow students;
- the inability of the family to support their children in their studies.

To the question: “In your opinion, what could help Roma children to receive a good education?” the answers focused on 4 aspects:

- awareness raising for teachers;
- support for parents of students;
- study help for young people (Second Chance Education);
- scholarships.

Regarding this last point, it should be emphasized that in Hungary there are scholarships for Roma students, but only for excellence. Instead, it would be important to have generalized support so that all children and young people can study.

## Social, cultural and political Participation

From the answers we can deduce the lack of courses, initiatives for young Roma, as well as the lack of associations, NGOs in which they could be part. It is possible that these initiatives and organizations do not exist, or that they exist but are not known by the young target audience.

On the other hand, though, all respondents think that initiatives for young people would have a positive impact.

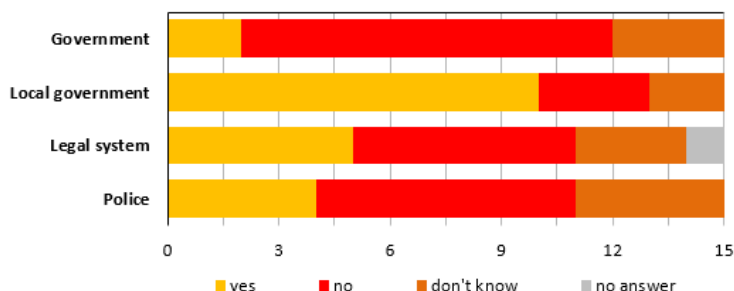
Three-quarter of the respondents say they do not see themselves involved in community initiatives in the future: this is a figure that indicates how it is necessary to work not only to increase the offer, but also to increase awareness, commitment, and active participation. It must be said that this rate is in any case in line with the general decrease in youth participation.

Finally, 80% say that their personal relationships develop outside their ethnic community. This data can be read in different ways and would require further investigation.

## Trust

Two-third of respondents trust local governments, and the same rate does not trust the National government. Considering the period in which the questionnaire was conducted, it can be said that this distrust in government authorities is not necessarily linked to ethnic identity. Confidence in the police is low.

The data reveal a general disinterest in political participation for active involvement in politics, despite 40% declaring themselves informed.



## Discrimination

Discrimination remains felt strongly in Hungary by the Roma minority. Only one respondent reported never having experienced discrimination, while 5 have felt constantly discriminated against and 9 have felt discriminated against sometimes.

Mostly verbal attacks or inappropriate behavior have been experienced, but in 3 cases also physical attacks.



## Life Satisfaction

11 respondents declared to have better living conditions like their parents and 4 feel themselves in the same conditions.

When asked what they consider the best thing in their life, apart from personal relationships and family, our youngsters answered to achieve their goals, their work and studies, positive outlook on life, creativity and curiosity, faith, friends, travel, music, the community.

## Wishes, Hopes and Dreams

Respondents were asked what they would change, if they had a magic wand.

Here a summary of the answers:

- to have a better and more just world, without discrimination, racial hatred, poverty and wars;
- help their families - both materially and by changing their perspective
- improve the political and economic situation;
- to eliminate social differences, providing to everyone equal chances and opportunities;
- make people more compassionate, attentive to others and respectful;
- "learn to play my flute well and become famous".
- One participant gave a deeply disheartening response: "I would not be a Roma".

About what do they hope for, what do they dream about, the answers are more concrete and are mostly related to

- to own a house/flat;
- to have good standard of living;
- to have a secure financial background, without having to worry about what tomorrow will bring;
- to travel;
- to be successful, famous.

## BEST PRACTICES

The **Sure Start Children's Home** is an institution based in Budapest (VIII district) providing, since 2009, in Budapest equal opportunities in early childhood for the development of innate abilities, successful kindergarten participation and school start, creating an environment with the active participation of the family and the wider environment.

Can be visited by children aged 0-3 years and families, free of charge.

- Activities provided for children, as skill-developing activities or involving fine motor skills;
- Support and assessment by special education teacher, health workers, psychologists, special education teachers, doctors, dieticians;
- Group discussions for parents;
- Activities for parents for personality and competence development;
- Training to develop parenting skills, as well as home and personal care and hygiene skills;



- The center can even provide washing, drying, and cleaning facilities;
- Support for bureaucratic and administrative tasks;
- Support in house and job search.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Invest in social-emotional training preschool educators and primary school teachers**

Discrimination starts from prejudice, which affects the entire community, including the parents of the children, the educators, the school staff.

An example taken from the dialogue with people of Roma ethnicity: at school, a pair of shoes went missing and the Roma child was immediately suspected by the parents of the other children. The educators did not openly accuse... but also did not intervene (or also did not defend him). Then the shoes were found (they had not been stolen) but no one apologized to the Roma child.

This attitude created a rift between the child and the teacher as a reference and protection figure. It created a distrust that never healed, and instilled in the child the belief that they must always be on guard of having to defend himself and therefore, possibly, attack first.

Testimonies show that instead, when educators focus on building a group identity, fostering solidarity, also educating parents, there are no conflicts and learning results are better.

For this reason, we believe it is necessary to invest in the social skills of educators or teachers and staff, and develop social emotional learning and skills. This should be done in the initial education of future teachers and also as a refresher for educators (and staff) in practice.

Increasing support for children and young people's education

In Hungary there are well-functioning "Second Chance Education" centers, offering support to children with learning difficulties. Often, early help allows the child to overcome initial difficulties and have a regular and fruitful school career.

Unfortunately, there are not enough funds, in order to offer the service to everyone who needs it. It would be a very worthwhile investment in both the short and long term.

### **Housing Support**

The primary desire of young Roma, and not only Roma we can say, is to be able to have their own home. The importance of offering social housing solutions to allow wider segments of the population to have access to housing is highlighted.

### **Study Support**

There are scholarship opportunities to support students belonging to the Roma minority, but only reserved for high-achieving individuals. Instead, it would be appropriate to support the school career of "average" students, so that they can successfully complete their studies and reach higher education, taking advantage of their abilities, even if not only "excellent".

## LOCAL CONTEXT

### Sinti and Roma in the Province of Bolzano

Bolzano is a city of about 100.000 inhabitants and is the capital of Italy's northernmost province, South Tyrol, which borders the Austrian region of Tyrol. Like many border regions, the province of Bolzano has historically been home to itinerant minorities who, in the past, worked as traders, street performers, and providers of goods and services to settled farmers.

Sinti family groups known as *Taitsch* (Germans) or *Estrexaria* (Austrians) have been present in Tyrol and South Tyrol for centuries. After the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia (1991–1996), many Roma families arrived, mainly from the Republic of Macedonia, and to a lesser extent from Bosnia, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

**Currently, about 1500 Roma and Sinti live in the Province of Bolzano (0.3% of the resident population).** It is a young population: it is estimated that more than half of the local Roma and Sinti are under the age of 40. Estimates of the percentage of young people among Roma and Sinti populations in other European countries are similar, therefore the project considers the voice and opinions of young people to be very important for the present and future of these communities, who are our fellow citizens.

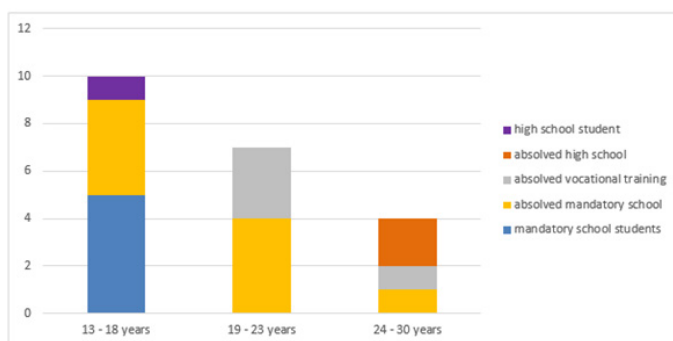
## SURVEY RESULTS

### The Interviews

A total of 21 Roma and Sinti youth, all residents in Bolzano or surroundings, were interviewed (14 female and 7 male):

- 10 participants (5 female, 5 male) aged between 13 and 18,
- 7 participants (6 F and 1 M) aged between 19 and 23,
- 4 participants (3 F and 1 M) aged between 24 and 30.

The levels of education attained are as follows:



Most participants are satisfied with their living environment. They consider Bolzano a peaceful, human-scale city, where they were born and raised, and they report feeling free to express themselves. One negative aspect that emerged is the high cost of living in Bolzano.

## **Employment and Satisfaction**

- 10 young people (almost the half) are employed in the trade and services sector,
- 8 are students,
- 2 were unemployed at the time of the interview,
- 1 is a young mother of five children.

The vast majority are satisfied with their current situation.

One unemployed youth reported being satisfied with their situation because it allows more free time to spend with friends.

One young woman, although employed, would like to continue studying and is therefore not fully satisfied with her current condition.

Three students reported feeling uncomfortable at school, struggling to keep up with the curriculum, and often experiencing open or internal conflicts.

## **Identity and Visibility**

90% of the young people interviewed speak the Romani or Sinti language, consider it important to know it, and do not hide their identity from the majority population - including friends, classmates, neighbors, coworkers.

The participants recognize their identity through specific values and lifestyle, or through the various traditions that characterize their people. Some Roma acknowledge having different cultural traits based on their parents' countries of origin (Balkan countries).

However, it is also significant that more than a third of the participants stated they do not feel different from their peers and do not perceive themselves as having any specific traits that define a particular identity. These responses reflect the multicultural nature of youth in our region: so diverse, interdependent, and fluid that there is no longer a need to define oneself by identity, class, gender, ethnicity, or other categories.

## **School and Work Environment**

When analyzing the school or work environment, more than a third of participants reported feeling fully included and not experiencing any form of discrimination:

- 8 young people feel perfectly included;
- 13 do not feel strongly discriminated against, but also not fully included.

To feel more included, 6 participants suggested that individual support, empowerment, or efforts to reduce prejudice from the majority society could be helpful.

However, 40% of those who feel only partially included stated they either do not need any support or do not know how full inclusion could be achieved.

Specifically regarding school, all participants acknowledged the difficulties they have

encountered in their educational paths. The reasons given for these difficulties were:

- 5 young people attributed school failure to a lack of support from their families;
- 4 believe that Roma/Sinti families have different values, which do not prioritize academic achievement;
- 4 consider school too difficult and unsuitable for their children's needs;
- 2 believe that schools are not equipped to work with Roma and Sinti children;
- 2 stated that academic success is a personal choice and journey, and neither school nor family has a significant influence;
- 4 were unable to provide a reason.

According to the interviewees, Roma and Sinti children could be supported in school through:

- greater attention and understanding from teachers;
- financial support;
- a change in mindset among parents;
- no support needed, as academic success is a personal choice.

Specifically, 80% of participants believe that teachers and schools should change their attitude toward Roma and Sinti students by:

- enhancing individual or small group teaching;
- encouraging children;
- being more tolerant;
- caring for them more attentively and thoroughly;
- building concrete job opportunities together;
- working with families to change their attitude toward education.

## **Social, Cultural, and Political Participation**

The survey revealed a limited awareness among Roma and Sinti youth in Bolzano regarding the activities, services, and projects aimed at their demographic. 10 out of 21 participants stated they were aware of specific projects, mainly related to two non-profit organizations active in the area. Additionally, two-thirds of the young people expressed support for this type of initiative. Even if they are not aware of any currently active projects, they believe such initiatives would be useful for their educational and/or professional future, for individualized support that respects their specific needs, and for keeping Roma and Sinti culture alive.

Most of the young people have never taken part in training sessions, courses, or extra-curricular workshops, and almost none are enrolled in or actively involved with any kind of association (cultural, sports, political).

16 participants said they would be willing to take part in activities for the local community. Most feel prepared for social work (with children, the elderly, the homeless, or people with

addictions), while others would like to be active in environmental or animal rights causes. One young woman said she would gladly work to combat prejudice against the Sinti. A couple of participants had no specific preference and said they would be willing to do any task assigned to them.

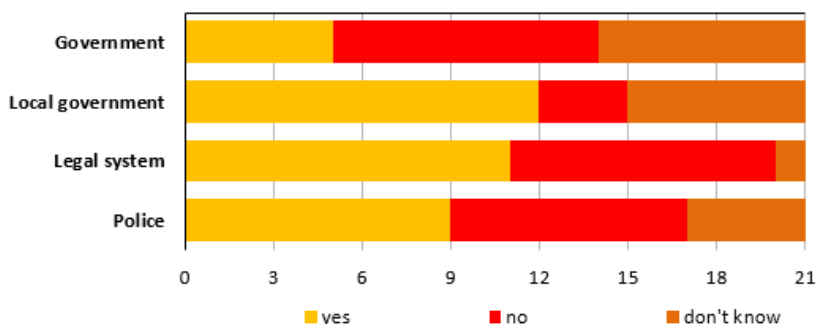
Political participation is non-existent.

## Trust in Institutions

All participants were asked a short and direct question about whether they had trust in:

- the national government
- local government (provincial, municipal)
- the law
- police

The responses are summarized in the following chart:



Upon a total number of 84 answers (21 for 4 topics), we have following results:

- 44% do trust in institutions
- 35% don't trust in institutions<sup>1</sup>
- 21% don't know

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the high level of distrust toward the national government and the law, the Italian anthropologist Leonardo Piasere refers to European studies from the 1990s that gave rise to "una nuova lettura della storia zingara in termini di resistenza, anche aggressiva, a quella forma di organizzazione politica conosciuta come 'Stato', nata nell'Europa moderna (anche in opposizione esplicita agli zingari stessi) ed esportata poi ovunque nel mondo, ma di cui gli zingari si sono sempre disimpegnati. Ai giorni nostri la 'statizzazione' totale del pianeta è quasi terminata e gli zingari, dall'interno degli Stati, si trovano a essere fra i pochi che continuano a disconoscere i grandi sistemi sui quali gli Stati sono costruiti" (L. Piasere, *Un mondo di mondi*, L'ancora, Napoli 1999, p. 52) [*"a new interpretation of Gypsy history in terms of resistance - even aggressive resistance - to that form of political organization known as the 'State,' which emerged in modern Europe (also in explicit opposition to the Gypsies themselves) and was later exported throughout the world, but from which the Gypsies have always disengaged. Today, the total 'statalization' of the planet is nearly complete, and the Gypsies, from within the States, find themselves among the few who continue to reject the major systems upon which States are built."*]

## Discrimination

When addressing the sensitive topic of discrimination, 12 out of 21 young people reported having personally experienced it. Most cases involved verbal insults, offensive comments, or hostile looks and gestures. Less frequent, but still significant, were episodes of physical attacks, bullying, exclusion, and intentional marginalization.

When asked whether they adopt specific behaviors or strategies to avoid discrimination, more than half admitted they do nothing in particular. Three participants said they actively engage in fighting anti-Roma racism (anti-gypsism), while four admitted they were either unable or unwilling to respond. One young woman stated that when she faces racist attacks, she retaliates by attacking back.

## Life Satisfaction

Two-thirds of the participants stated that their quality of life is better than that of their parents, indicating a perceived generational improvement in happiness and well-being. One-third believed there had been no significant change, and no one felt worse off than their parents.

When asked what they consider the best thing in their life, most young people mentioned family and friends. Others expressed satisfaction with their job, the sport they practice, the freedom they enjoy, the level of integration they have achieved, or simply with themselves as individuals.

The youngest participants, still in adolescence, were unable to answer this question.

## Wishes, Hopes, and Dreams

The final two questions of the survey explored the wishes and dreams of Roma and Sinti youth in Bolzano.

They were asked, somewhat spontaneously: *“If you could do magic, what would you change in your life?”*

A quarter of the responses expressed a desire for better financial circumstances. One-fifth, showing great maturity, wished they could go back in time to fix past mistakes. Others wanted to move away, move to another city, change their lifestyle, or even their physical appearance. Three people said they wouldn’t change anything—they are happy with who they are and how they live.

The most symbolic answers came from two teenagers who simply answered: *“Everything”* and *“The whole world.”*

The dreams and hopes of the young participants also include economic, housing, and family stability. The youngest dream of becoming very rich, becoming important people, or becoming great athletes. They have big dreams and hopes, just like many other young people in today's globalized, interconnected, and fluid society.

## BEST PRACTICES

### Context-Sensitive Approach

Before designing or implementing interventions, it is essential to prioritize understanding the family and relational context of Roma and Sinti youth. Institutional tools are often standardized and may not reflect the lived realities of these communities. A targeted, evidence-based intervention should result from careful observation and deep listening.

### Intergenerational Dynamics

Mediation efforts should acknowledge and value the influence of intergenerational dynamics, including historical trauma, cultural transmission, and shifts in family roles. Interventions that involve both youth and parents can help bridge cultural values and expectations, particularly in areas such as education and career planning.

### Conscious Engagement

Intercultural mediators train frontline workers, educators, and social workers to avoid symmetrical responses to conflict, anger, or aggressive behavior. Engagement must be rooted in empathy, resilience-building, and pedagogy, recognizing that youth from marginalized backgrounds do not start from the same point as others.

### Community Participation

Caritas services aim to strengthen community-based pathways that enable marginalized individuals to participate in civil society not only as beneficiaries but also as contributors. For Roma and Sinti youth involved in the *enROMyou* project, we should design participatory projects that reflect their interests (e.g., environmentalism, social justice, animal rights) and support the affirmation of their identity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Slow and Respectful Integration

Avoid rushed or forced integration strategies. As highlighted by ethno-psychological and psychoanalytic studies - including the important contributions of G. Devereux, S. Ferenczi, and D. W. Winnicott - a healthy process of acculturation and adaptation to one's environment is essential for the development of individual and identity awareness. Effective inclusion is built over time through trust and mutual understanding. Patience is key, especially when working with communities that have experienced historical marginalization and exclusion.

### Expand Indicators Beyond Education

While educational attainment is an important metric, it should not be the sole indicator of integration or success. Social workers and researchers should also consider complementary qualitative measures such as personal well-being, trust in workplace culture, autonomy, and satisfaction with social participation.

### Cross-Border Cultural Affinities

Leverage the cultural and historical ties between South Tyrol and neighboring regions such as Austria, as well as Balkan countries like Romania and Hungary. Shared cultural elements and parallel challenges can support cooperative strategies and peer learning opportunities across borders.

### Normalize Through Specificity

Rather than viewing Roma and Sinti as fundamentally separate or "other," work toward a framework that recognizes their specificity within a broader norm of diversity. The goal should be to reach a point where they are seen as one of many cultural groups, addressing antiziganism as a distinct but not defining barrier.

### Reframe the Concept of "Integration"

We should challenge prevailing assumptions by posing guiding questions to policymakers and practitioners:

- When can we say that a group is "normally" integrated?
- What measurable outcomes reflect equality of participation, not just access?
- Are we designing for inclusion or assimilation, and how do we distinguish between the two?



# ROMANIA

## LOCAL CONTEXT

**The Roma community in Romania continues to face significant structural barriers in both education and employment, contributing to a persistent cycle of poverty and social exclusion.** Educationally, Roma children experience high dropout rates, frequent segregation into lower-standard schools or classes, and systemic discrimination, resulting in low levels of secondary and higher education attainment. Economic hardship, early family responsibilities, and negative societal attitudes further exacerbate educational exclusion.

In the labor market, Roma individuals encounter substantially higher unemployment rates compared to the general population. Many are employed in low-paid, insecure, and informal sectors, with limited access to formal employment opportunities due to inadequate educational qualifications and discriminatory hiring practices.

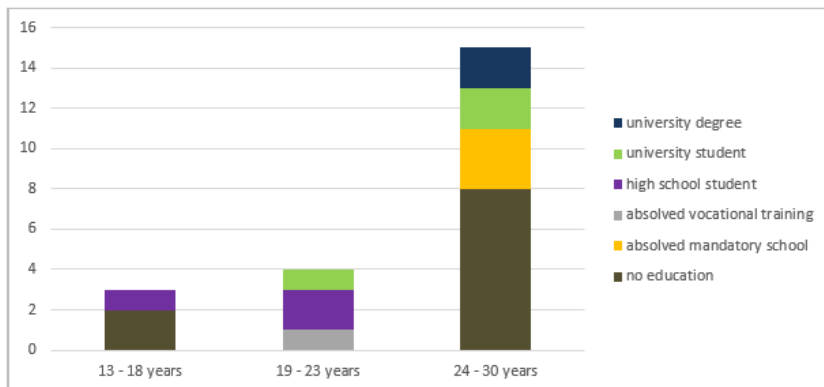
National and European initiatives, such as affirmative action in higher education, second-chance education programs, the deployment of school mediators, and the National Roma Inclusion Strategy (2022–2027), have aimed to address these challenges. Nevertheless, implementation gaps and societal resistance hinder substantial progress. Efforts to improve vocational training and transition to formal employment, including through programs like ROMACT, have had limited success, as many Roma remain marginalized in the informal economy. Sustainable inclusion requires systemic reforms, robust enforcement of anti-discrimination measures, and targeted interventions that address both educational and labor market disparities.

## SURVEYS RESULTS

### The interviews

The survey gathered 22 responses from Roma youth aged between 13 and 30 years. Most participants were from large cities, with very few from medium-sized cities or villages. Educational levels were generally low: nearly half of the older respondents (24–30 years) reported having received no formal education, while only a few pursued university studies. Younger respondents (13–23 years) were more likely to be enrolled in high school or university, although cases of no education were still present.

The gender distribution showed a majority of male participants (13), along with several females (8) and one participant identifying as other. Satisfaction with living conditions varied: most respondents living in large cities were content, while those from smaller towns or villages reported lower satisfaction. Overall, the data highlight limited educational attainment, urban concentration, and ongoing living conditions challenges.



## Occupation and Satisfaction

Excluding students, about half of the respondents who are currently employed report being satisfied with their work. Those satisfied are mostly involved in cleaning or unskilled jobs and appreciate having a stable income or being able to support their families. In contrast, dissatisfaction was more common among day laborers and those in unstable jobs, with low pay and poor working conditions cited as the main reasons. Students, who were not included in this comparison, reported full satisfaction with their educational path, highlighting personal growth and supportive environments. Overall, young people in education are generally satisfied, while those already working are divided between valuing stability and seeking better opportunities.

## Identity and Visibility

Most respondents define their Roma identity through passed down through family and elders, with references to parents, grandparents, and traditional cultural practices. Other key elements mentioned include language, physical features (such as skin tone and facial structure), and a general sense of cultural belonging. A smaller number associate their

identity primarily with their name or simply “knowing” they belong to the Roma community. In terms of visibility, the majority of participants reported that people around them are aware of their Roma background. However, a few explicitly preferred not to disclose their ethnicity, either out of personal choice, or fear of stigma.

Regarding the importance of the Roma language, answers were polarized. While several participants rated its importance very highly (scores of 4 or 5 out of 5), a significant number rated it low (1 or 2), indicating a partial disconnection from the linguistic aspect of their heritage. Overall, the Roma language remains an important marker for many, but not for all.

The findings reflect a strong familial and cultural foundation in defining Roma identity, combined with varied experiences of visibility and a divided perception regarding the importance of preserving the Roma language.

## School and Work context

The main educational challenges reported by respondents include:

- Discrimination from both teachers and peers
- Financial difficulties
- Limited family support
- Weak foundational skills due to poor early education. Many young Roma described feeling isolated or humiliated in school, being called by derogatory names such as “gypsy” or facing harsher treatment compared to other students.

Workplace experiences mirror those in the education system. Respondents who entered the labor market early reported discriminatory behaviors from supervisors and unstable, low-paid jobs. A lack of job opportunities for people with little formal education is seen as a major barrier.

Support needs identified include: better leadership in schools and workplaces, financial aid (scholarships, materials, transport), access to Roma teachers and role models, more inclusive and empathetic educators, and dedicated programs for Roma students, including tutoring, counseling, and cultural representation in school curricula.

A key finding was that exactly 50% of parents or caregivers did not believe in the benefits of education, thus, children/teenagers often lack the necessary support (essential considering the existing school discrimination coming from both other students and teachers). A good percentage of respondents (41%) recognized that parents are/were very supportive of their school life.

Regarding the importance of education, most respondents rated it very highly (4 or 5 out of 5), although systemic barriers often prevented long-term school engagement.

When asked about what could help Roma children succeed in education, the most

frequent answers were: scholarships, better financial support, access to basic necessities, presence of Roma educators, inclusive environments, and cultural visibility in schools. A strong emphasis was also placed on cultural elements. Several respondents proposed using Roma history, music, and traditions as tools for community empowerment. Music, in particular, emerged repeatedly as a connecting point: respondents associated pride and identity with Roma singers and musicians (mentioning names like Alex Velea, Connect-R, Andra, and traditional lăutărească influences). Awareness activities around Roma history and the centuries of discrimination were seen as vital to increasing confidence and belonging among young Roma.

The responses highlight an urgent need and employment, starting from addressing discrimination and economic inequality to actively promoting Roma culture and identity within mainstream society.

### **Social, cultural and political Participation**

Participation in organized activities or programs targeting Roma youth remains low. While some respondents mentioned knowing about initiatives like Erasmus+, eRomnja, PeBune, or youth exchanges, only a few have participated directly. Involvement in NGOs exists, mostly among groups focused on Roma women's rights or vulnerable youth, but remains isolated.

Most respondents believe that such programs could bring positive changes by creating opportunities, encouraging exposure to different environments, and improving social acceptance, though they also highlight barriers like lack of funding, systemic discrimination, and administrative obstacles.

Friendships are mixed between Roma and non-Roma circles. Political participation is very low, with most respondents not interested in being active. Only a few expressed distant ambitions, such as becoming local mayors or participating in European political life.

Music, history, and cultural identity were frequently mentioned as important channels for strengthening community pride and promoting real social integration.

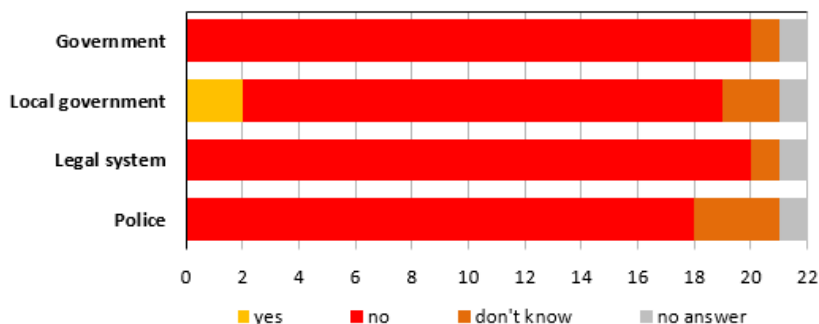
### **Trust**

The overall level of trust in public institutions among respondents is extremely low.

Almost all participants declared no trust in the government, local authorities, the legal system, or the police. Only two isolated cases reported partial trust in local government, but even these were not accompanied by trust in other institutions.

The majority of answers were consistent and clear: distrust is widespread across all layers of public life, with institutions perceived as distant, ineffective, or discriminatory.

This deep lack of trust highlights a major obstacle for the social and civic integration of Roma youth and underlines the urgent need for initiatives that rebuild confidence through accountability, transparency, and genuine inclusion.



## Discrimination

The overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) reported frequent experiences of discrimination based on their Roma background. Most commonly, this took the form of:

- verbal insults and offensive comments;
- inappropriate staring and gestures;
- in some cases, physical attacks;
- a significant number also reported experiencing cyberbullying;

In addition to these direct experiences, several participants detailed discrimination occurring specifically at school, at work, or from authority figures, while others mentioned social prejudice and being underestimated in their potential. Some respondents also indicated being targeted by security personnel while shopping.

Only two participants reported not experiencing discrimination, and one provided no answer.

Overall, the data reflect a widespread and systemic exposure to multiple forms of discrimination, with schools, workplaces and public spaces being the most frequently cited environments where such incidents occur.

## Life Satisfaction

Most respondents (81%) feel their life conditions are better than those of their parents, though a few reported no improvement or even worse conditions.

The main sources of satisfaction outside family are: faith and religion, health, work or school, personal passions like football and music, and for some, their children. Faith, health, and small personal achievements stand out as the strongest positive factors. Progress is felt mainly through personal health, faith, passions, and access to education or work, despite persistent hardships.

## Wishes, Hopes and Dreams

Most respondents dream of a better future where education, dignity, and stability are accessible. Many regret not having had the chance to attend school and see education as essential for breaking the cycle of poverty. A strong theme is the wish for a better, fairer world, free from discrimination, where Roma children can grow up proud and be respected. Health, financial security, and stable family lives are also frequent aspirations, often tied to hopes of seeing their children happy and successful. Some respondents mentioned the desire to leave their towns or even the country to seek better opportunities. While a few expressed internalized struggles with their physical traits, the strongest collective dream remains the same: a life of dignity, equality, and real chances for the next generation.

## BEST PRACTICES

At both national and local levels, there are some initiatives and programs aimed at supporting Roma youth, but they are often small in scale, fragmented, and not directly focused on educational advancement. NGOs and community groups offer assistance, mainly targeting basic needs, inclusion, or empowerment, rather than structured academic progress.

Non-formal education methods - meaning organized learning activities outside of formal schools - have gained ground through programs such as Erasmus+ Youth Participation Activities. These methods focus on skills like empathy, critical thinking, intercultural communication, and self-confidence. They are structured but flexible, allowing young people to learn through workshops, debates, group exercises, and practical experiences. Informal education, in contrast, refers to unintentional learning through everyday life and social interactions.

In Erasmus+ projects and local workshops, non-formal education has proven particularly effective with teenagers and young adults. It helps participants overcome internalized discrimination, build resilience, and improve their ability to interact diplomatically and confidently in society. Activities that encourage positive identity development, recognition of stereotypes, and respectful communication are crucial for fostering social inclusion among Roma youth.

One such initiative is the “Step Up: Empowering Roma Youth” from Cluj-Napoca. This Erasmus+ Youth Participation project supported Roma youth aged 15–25 through non-formal education. Participants engaged in workshops on self-confidence, anti-discrimination and communication, using creative tools like podcasts and video storytelling. The project fostered social skills, increased cultural visibility and encouraged leadership, with some participants later joining local youth councils. Its success was rooted

in safe, youth-centered spaces and the inclusion of Roma role models.

While there are promising practices, they remain localized and limited. Expanding these initiatives, especially those combining emotional support, education, and community empowerment, is essential for broader, sustainable impact.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the local survey, several urgent actions are recommended to address the systemic barriers faced by Roma youth in Romania, with a strong emphasis on the role that non-governmental organizations and community initiatives can play.

First, **NGOs and grassroots organizations should take a proactive lead in combating discrimination** by designing and delivering targeted educational programs, not only for Roma youth but also for wider society, including teachers, public officials, and local authority representatives. **Workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns must be developed to actively promote inclusion, empathy, and intercultural understanding.**

While the role of the state remains essential - particularly in ensuring systemic reforms and institutional accountability - real change must also be driven by **flexible, community-rooted initiatives that can adapt quickly, respond to local needs, and build trust with Roma communities.**

**Non-formal education methods, mentoring programs, youth leadership development, and intercultural exchanges** should be expanded, using successful models from countries such as Italy, where integration efforts have shown positive outcomes. **Strengthening international partnerships and sharing good practices** can further empower NGOs to push for systemic improvements while directly supporting Roma youth at the local level.

In parallel, **continuous advocacy** work is needed to hold institutions accountable and to encourage sustained national commitment for improving access to quality education, equal opportunities, and social inclusion for Roma communities.

# FINAL COMMENT

## Working with “*the lowest of the low*”

**enROMyou** is a small-scale project, which aimed at proposing activities in the field of youth work, starting from listening to some boys and girls of Roma and Sinti origin. The survey - conducted by interviewing **75 young people** between the **ages of 13 and 30** from the four partner countries (Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Romania) - does not claim to be exhaustive, nor representative of the entire Roma youth sector in those countries. The goal was to give these young people the opportunity to have their say, as well as to construct meaningful recommendations, based on the experiences of people who often face marginalization, and belong to a minority that is still highly stigmatized.


Hence **enROMyou** is a project that intentionally shall be independent of the number of Roma and Sinti in the four partner countries and the percentage of said minority in the total population. It has been a collaborative survey and training, with the aim to offer useful advice to social operators working with large groups of youth as well as those working in small groups or individual educational settings.

The overall picture provided by this project is a picture of young people who are currently experiencing better social situations than in the past, but who still suffer the burden of prejudice and fight hard for full recognition and equal rights and treatment. The “historical burden” that these young people carry remains heavy and is often underestimated in youth work.

Social workers, teachers and educators tend to assume that today, in the European Union where welfare reaches a large part of the population, all young people grow up with the same starting opportunities and social facilities. Indeed they overlook this “historical burden”: an intergenerational and psycho-dynamic factor that continues to affect the self-esteem and identity development of Roma and Sinti youth. Belonging to an excluded and despised social group - not only in closed, peasant and traditional societies, but also in modern, more open and unifying industrial societies - still contributes to a deep-rooted *feeling of inferiority*. As Michael Stewart aptly observes, despite the EU’s strong promotion of inclusion and equality, Roma and Sinti communities still tend to be perceived as “the lowest of the low.” <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. Stewart, *The time of the Gypsies*, Westview Press, Boulder – Oxford, 1997.





The interview responses, which were similar for all partner countries, speak clearly to us: although young respondents realize that they live in better conditions than their older family members, they still feel strongly subjected to stereotypes and discrimination. They perceive the still existent marginalization (or the inheritance of a marginal social position) as *shame* on one hand, as a source of *resentment* on the other. Both are emotions difficult to manage and to bring back to balance and serenity, thus to a condition of true psychological stability and social inclusion.

Discrimination, persecution, structural and historical exclusion experienced by Roma and Sinti people are all *traumatic situations* that can be traced back to emotional states forced to the limit. René Roussillon calls them “extreme affects” and traces them back to traumatic situations - both contextual or long-lasting - of great precariousness, terror, or primitive anguish. These are unintegrated and unprocessed psychic experiences, particularly subject to coercion and repetition, that haunt the individual from within and severely test his or her capacity for tolerance. The “survival strategies” implemented are also extremely weak, fraught with disinvestment in emotional and relational life, and often result in self-marginalization or explicitly antisocial behavior. Social stigma leaves a lasting mark on the individual’s psychological makeup and that of their family group; it is a feeling passed down from generation to generation, even when external conditions have changed or improved.


It then becomes a “chosen trauma” – as Vamik Volkan defines it<sup>3</sup> – attributable precisely to that social group and passed down from one generation to the next.

René Kaës investigates the psychic process of intergenerational transmission of affects, but also of the fantasies associated with these affects, of thought structures, of life investments and its disinvestments. He notes precisely how a family group implies a whole series of *unconscious alliances*, since each individual finds himself part of an *intersubjective* chain of which he is a member, and at the same time a link, a *servant*, a *beneficiary* and an *heir*.

For this reason, young people who have directly or indirectly experienced discrimination, fear, and “states of siege” need help and special attention, support that shares and accompanies their pain, in a *sharing of affection* (Roussillon) that leads them out of the trauma.

<sup>3</sup> V. D. Volkan, *Large-Group psychology: Racism, Societal Divisions, Narcissistic Leaders and Who We Are Now*, UK: Phoenix, 2020.

V. D. Volkan, R. Scholz and M. G. Fromm, *We Don't Speak of Fear: Large Group Identity, Societal Conflict and Collective Trauma*, UK: Phoenix, 2023.



In conclusion, taking into account the many aspects listed above, we believe these are the key commitments for those working with the younger generation of Roma and Sinti:

- Always take into account the *multiple vulnerabilities* of these young people, who are not only going through the fragile stage of adolescence, but often carry experiences of suspicion, exclusion, bullying and a sense of social inferiority due to their ethnic origin.
- Continually update your knowledge and work within an interdisciplinary team, as educational work with vulnerable people requires expertise across various fields: social pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, law, and more.
- Accompany and support moments of discouragement and confusion that young people may experience, recognizing that our own emotional field may sometimes be challenged. These moments - typical of "borderline states" like adolescence itself - often express a desire for growth and self-discovery in an environment historically perceived as hostile.
- Recognize that at European level, actually today, social workers and institutions are strongly invited to promote collective equality and well-being (e.g., intercultural education in schools, open youth associations, targeted projects for vulnerable groups, public support for education and training).
- Ensure access to team supervision led by professionals trained to identify and reflect on transference and countertransference dynamics, helping practitioners stay grounded and supported in their coaching and mentoring roles.
- Listen deeply and non-judgmentally to these young people - their perspectives, needs, and worldviews - while guiding them toward their aspirations and helping them adjust expectations when necessary.
- Offer yourself as a "fellow traveler", supporting them as they navigate the often challenging gap between family life and broader social integration.
- Promote political awareness and engagement, encouraging active citizenship.
- Invest in the next generation - young people who, with time and support, will feel less burdened by inferiority or resentment, and more capable of developing balanced strategies for belonging, growth, and positive societal impact.
- Addressing historical injustices through initiatives, teaching materials and commemorative events.
- Fostering recognition and respect from majority society via inclusive participation opportunities.
- Creating safe spaces for exchange between older and younger Roma generations.
- Including role models and mentors from both Roma and majority communities.
- Ensuring youth and social work integrates cultural sensitivity and affections share as a core competency.

# VISUAL TOUR

Austria – Burgenland – Eisenstadt

## KICK-OFF MEETING

15 – 17 July 2024





**KICK OFF  
MEETING  
IN EISENSTADT**

Monday  
July 15, 2024



Nº: KA210-YOU-4AD4B8BB  
enROMyou:  
Enhancing Roma  
youth work





Romania – Bucharest – LTTA  
28 Feb. – 1 March 2025



# ENROMYOU

enROMyou – Enhancing Roma Youth Work

Dates:	February 27th – March 2nd, 2025
Location:	Fundatia Națională pentru Tineret (FNT), Caderea Bastiliei 11, Bucharest, Romania
Project Number:	KA210-YOU-4AD4B8BB



## SOURCES and ATTACHMENTS

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### ATTACHMENT

The full version of the survey is available at the following link:  
[https://www.vhs-roma.eu/downloads/enROMyou\\_survey\\_en.pdf](https://www.vhs-roma.eu/downloads/enROMyou_survey_en.pdf)





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