



HANDBOOK SHORT VERSION


**Context overview and
inclusive practices**

Erasmus+

Project N. KA210-YOU-4AD4B8BB



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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, to promote a better understanding of cultural differences, traditions, values and needs.

The main goals were 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, to better be equipped to identify and respond appropriately to the specific needs of Roma and Sinti communities;
- To foster social inclusion, identifying existing barriers and developed best practices to improve the inclusion of Roma and Sinti in educational institutions, healthcare systems, and the labour market;
- To build sustainable partnerships encouraging cooperation among social services, NGOs, educational institutions, and Roma representatives;
- To raise awareness of Roma culture and history and to contribute to greater public understanding.

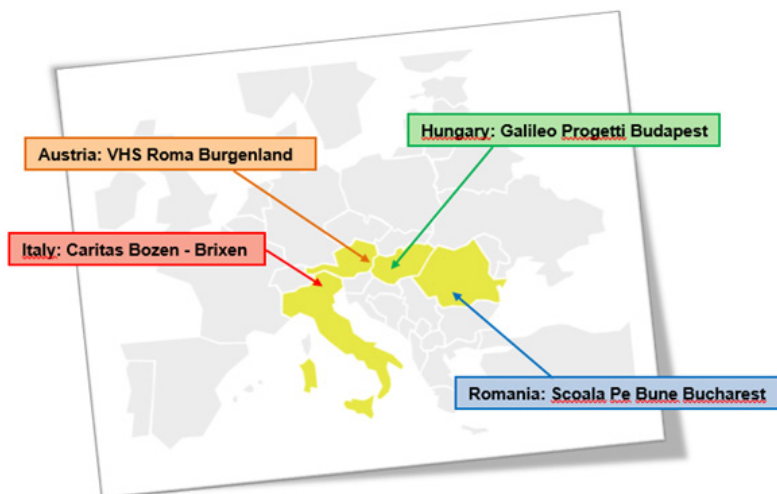
The project addresses 3 target groups:

- 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, facing mental health and psychological issues of their target groups. Often there is a lack of appropriate support systems as well as innovative methods.

Thanks to the enROMyou project we created a knowledge base on the needs and desires of young Roma on the one hand, and on the other, appropriate and proven methods and new approaches to address their concerns and problems that is available, together with the knowledge and experience of the partners, in the publication ***Handbook for social & educational work with Roma and Sinti youth*** (https://www.vhs-roma.eu/downloads/enROMyou_HANDBOOK_LV_en.pdf), to reach a wide audience and professional colleagues.

PARTNERS



AUSTRIA: ROMA VHS



The Roma Volkshochschule Burgenland (Roma VHS) is an educational and cultural center committed to empowering minority communities. Its focus is on both autochthonous and non-autochthonous Roma and Sinti in Austria, as well as people with migration backgrounds and people with refugee experience. Its work spans youth and adult education, vocational training, cultural projects, commemorative initiatives and programs on Roma language and culture(s).

A central aim is to build bridges – between different minority groups as well as between minorities and the majority population.

All its projects are open to the public, with a special focus on professionals in social work, education, training, policymaking, and civil society. Through its activities, Roma VHS promotes knowledge, exchange, and mutual understanding.

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

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/roma_vhs_burgenland/

HUNGARY: GALILEO PROGETTI NONPROFIT KFT.



Galileo's mission is to combat discrimination, support employment, the social and civil inclusion of all, respect for rights, and strengthen freedom of thought and expression in all contexts. Galileo works at the European level to promote inclusion policies, quality education, youth participation, the social economy, and European citizenship

education. It focuses specifically on youth policies, preschool education, and social inclusion and equal opportunities. Its primary target groups are vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and those at risk of social exclusion.

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/galileoprogettinonprofit>

ITALY: CARITAS BOZEN-BRIXEN/BOLZANO-BRESSANONE



Diocesi Bolzano-Bressanone
Diözese Bozen-Brixen
Dioceza Balsan-Porsenü

Caritas is a religious foundation focused on raising awareness of social issues and creating networks to help disadvantaged people. Its main goals are to promote social inclusion, solidarity, and social justice by fostering values like equality among diverse groups. Caritas

encourages young people to think about important topics such as justice and poverty, and promotes volunteering to enhance social responsibility.

The Intercultural Mediation Service supports Roma and Sinti youth in their education and aims to assist families facing social and economic challenges. The situation of many families still reveals an initial gap, which actually prevents people belonging to these minorities from having equal opportunities.

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/caritas.bz.it>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/caritas_suedtirol_altoadige

ROMANIA: SCOALA PE BUNE



Scoala Pe Bune specializes in personalized educational programs, therapy, and counselling for children and young adults, prioritizing non-formal education methods that emphasize interactive learning and problem-solving. The aim is to foster not only 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 disadvantaged children, connecting them with support networks, including potential job opportunities and international experiences through Erasmus programs. They actively engage children and young adults, maintaining strong communication with parents and caregivers to ensure the overall well-being of at-risk children.

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/scoalapebune>

METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE: THE SURVEY

The survey was created during the kick-off meeting, with around 50 questions aimed at young people aged 13–30.

Since enROMyou is a small-scale project, the survey was limited to 15–25 participants per partner country.

Total completed surveys: 75

Austria	17
Hungary	15
Italy	21
Romania	22

The aim of the survey was to “let some young Roma and Sinti people speak” about their current living conditions, their sense of identity and, last but not least, their hopes and dreams for the future. The main thematic areas covered were:

Personal data: age, gender, education level, occupation, living context, identity

Education and work: value of education, integration, career opportunities, needs, suggestions

Social and cultural integration: awareness and opinions about institutions, social participation

Trust and political participation: trust in institutions, political activity

Discrimination: perceived or experienced direct discrimination

Overall life satisfaction: life satisfaction, hopes and dreams

The full English version of the survey is available at the following link:

https://www.vhs-roma.eu/downloads/enROMyou_survey_en.pdf

METHODOLOGY

The survey included both closed and open-ended questions to allow freedom of expression while keeping it concise.

Data was collected using:

- **One-to-one paper interviews**
- **CAPI** (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing)
- **CAWI** (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing)
- **SAQ** (Self-Administered Questionnaire – for participants aged 24+)

In in-person interviews, the interviewer ensured all questions were clearly understood.

Confidentiality was guaranteed: no personal data was collected, ensuring anonymity.

All responses were reviewed and cleaned to remove typographical or human errors, ensuring accuracy for analysis.



THE VOICE OF ROMA AND SINTI YOUTH

In-depth analysis of responses and cross-cutting themes

The analysis of the survey responses paints a picture of young people who are experiencing better social conditions than in the past, yet still carry the burden of prejudice and continue to fight hard for full recognition, equal rights, and equal treatment. Despite material progress, broader social rights, the inclusion of Eastern European countries in the European Union, and improved living conditions, the struggle for substantive equality remains unfinished.

Roma Gen Z aspires not only to inclusion, but also to self-determination and to having their voices heard in shaping inclusive societies.

The main cross-cutting themes emerging from the analysis across the four partner countries are:

- **Overall data**

In total 75 young Roma and Sinti aged between 13 and 30 years were reached (43 female, 35 male and 1 non-binary). Most participants came from large cities or their immediate surroundings.

Educational levels were fairly evenly distributed, ranging from no formal schooling, to being a current student, to having completed vocational or high school education, and up to a university degree.

- **Identity and Language Dynamics**

These dynamics reveal contrasting realities – ranging from full pride, particularly among activists, to protective strategies aimed at avoiding bias.

In Austria and Hungary, less than 30% of respondents speak Romani. In South Tyrol (Italy), the language is preserved through cohesive community structures, while in Romania it is maintained largely due to the continuity and size of the Roma minority.

- **Job and Employment**

The responses show unemployment disparities, which are up to 30% higher than national averages. Gender inequality is also significant, as Roma women face double discrimination. Informal labor - as day labor without protections or low-skilled service jobs - is still a common trait among Roma and Sinti.


Responses show anyway a “satisfaction paradox”: gratitude for unstable jobs (cleaning/ manual labor) if they provide subsistence.

Upward mobility is still blocked by low educational qualifications and discriminatory hiring practices.

- **Education and Educational Barriers**

Early school leaving is an overall and historical feature for Roma and Sinti minorities across Europe, as shown by country reports and statistics.

In youth responses, the lack of formal education is due to teacher/peer discrimination combined with low family support (poverty, intergenerational distrust).



Several Eastern European participants reported attending under-resourced “ghetto schools”. Main factors for school dropout are absence of role models, cultural devaluation, families prioritizing survival tasks over education. Also ineffective funding is pointed out: scholarships for “excellence only” (Hungary), not addressing basic needs.

According to the participant youth, possible solutions could be: teacher training on Roma culture/history, universal scholarships, mentorship programs.

- **Socio-Political Participation**

The main responses show a trust deficit, as a well known historical feature of the relationship of Roma/Sinti and the national or local institutions, the legal system or the law enforcement agencies.

Roma and Sinti youth in the four countries appear highly disconnected from and disappointed with politics - though this may also be an overall feature of European Gen Z.

Socio-political disengagement is also due to historical policy failures, which till now avoided any Roma representation in decision-making spaces. The awareness of new and targeted programs (e.g., Erasmus+) is limited as well.

Notably, there is an emerging form of engagement among young participants, reflected in a growing interest in cultural activism (e.g., music and history) and in social work.

- **Discrimination**

Insults, derogatory terms (“gypsy”), and aggressive gestures are widespread and still a cause of internalized stigma and resentment.

The main discrimination feelings are connected with structural exclusion (e.g. denial of housing/job opportunities), school segregation, experiences of physical violence, bullying and cyberbullying.

The reactions towards discrimination are different: from coping strategies to concealing ethnic identity, to social withdrawal.

Discrimination acts from the side of national majorities in the four countries perpetuate marginalization and limit the access to education or employment.

- **Life Satisfaction: Generational Shifts**

As already mentioned above, most youth report better conditions than their parents, crediting urban services and opportunities, cross-ethnic friendships and state welfare.

Family is still seen as the primary source of happiness, alongside values such as faith, self-determination, freedom.

- **Aspirations: Wishes and Dreams**

Roma and Sinti youth express shared dreams and aspirations such as dignity, ending racism and achieving equality. Also economic security (e.g. homeownership, stable jobs) is a big wish.

It is worth noting how many respondents value school-education as a means of self and group emancipation.

Their dreams range from geographic mobility (e.g. living somewhere else, travelling, escaping segregated communities) to artistic recognition (fame through music), to social visibility and achieved respect.



PROJECT PARTNERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

AUSTRIA

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 important finding 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 due to 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 **improving access to higher education, promoting Roma culture and history in mainstream society, and empowering Roma 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

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 were missing and the Roma child was immediately suspected by the parents of the other children. The educators did not explicitly accuse the child, but they 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 “awareness” of having to defend himself and therefore, possibly, attack first.

Testimonies show that, instead, when educators work on children as a “group”, as “solidarity companions”, also educating parents, there are no conflicts and learning results are better. For this reason, 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 to support excellence. 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".

ITALY

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 the surrounding 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 pose guiding questions to policymakers and professionals:

- 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

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 (Südtirol), 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 designed to propose youth work activities by listening to Roma and Sinti boys and girls. The survey, based on interviews with 75 young people aged 13–30 in Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Romania, does not claim to be exhaustive or representative. Its aim was to provide young people with a voice and to construct meaningful recommendations grounded in the experience of a minority that still faces severe stigmatization.



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.

As already pointed out above, Roma and Sinti youth still suffer a heavy “historical burden”, which 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.”


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 and exclusion can be traced back to what René Roussillon calls “extreme affects”: 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 – 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.

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.



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