ERGO NETWORK

ROMA ACCESS TO QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND LIFELONG LEARNING

IN BULGARIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA, SPAIN

with additional benchmarking evidence from Ireland and Sweden

This report was written by Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Adviser with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, based on an extensive data collection exercise among the ERGO Network national membership, carried out between April and September 2025. Members in Bulgaria (Integro Association), the Czech Republic (Life Together), Hungary (Autonómia Foundation), Romania (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities), Slovakia (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre), and Spain (Federation of Roma Association in Catalonia) have provided direct evidence through in-depth national case studies. Additional benchmarking evidence was contributed by other ERGO Network members in the Czech Republic (Ara Art, RomanoNet), Ireland (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre), and Sweden (Trajosko Drom).

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Federal Foreign Office

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all six countries, the Roma continue to face persistently low educational attainment and learning outcomes throughout the lifecycle

Comprehensive investment in Roma education is urgently needed, ensuring wrap-around support policies from early childhood to adult learning, combined with adequate, predictable funding, and disaggregated monitoring and indicators by ethnicity.

Financial and non-financial barriers to education continue to drive dropout and high NEET rates among Roma learners

Governments should provide adequate income support and access to services to learners and their families, while tackling the shortage of good-quality, culturally competent educational establishments located where the Roma live.

Support for Roma learners and their families remains inconsistent, while educational mediators are underutilised

Establish stable, state-funded systems of Roma educational mediators and assistants, ensuring proper accreditation, fair pay, and coordination with teachers and social services, alongside providing bilingual, after-school, and parental outreach programmes.

Antigypsyism and segregation remain pervasive, while Roma language and culture are invisible in curricula

School segregation must be eradicated, alongside strong enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in education, mandatory anti-bias and intercultural training for all education staff, and the integration of Roma language, history, and culture in schools.

Educational disadvantage lasts a lifetime, locking the Roma out of lifelong learning, quality employment, and social mobility

Supportive lifelong learning opportunities are needed through well-designed second-chance schools and relevant skills training, that account for the needs of adult learners such as childcare, income, and transport, as well as different starting points.

Roma communities and their civil society organisations must be involved, in order to co-create sustainable ways forward.

Policy makers and all educational actors must cooperate closely with Roma stakeholders and their civil society representatives, to ensure evidence-based solutions, support disaggregated data collection, foster common understanding, and bridge cultural gaps.

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE

While *skills for competitiveness* is Europe's current mantra, a much broader approach to education, training, and lifelong learning is needed to ensure equality and social inclusion for Roma.

From a very young age, Roma children are unable to access the same learning opportunities as their peers. Poverty and discrimination lead to significantly lower attendance and completion rates for the Roma throughout the lifecycle. Pervasive antigypsyism, civil and institutional, results in segregated educational facilities and the misplacement of Roma children in special needs establishments. In the absence of sufficient and accessible second chance schools and training opportunities, lifelong learning and upskilling are further impeded, and the Roma find themselves trapped in a constant state of poverty and low skills.

The EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020 – 2030 includes, as one of its four sectoral objectives, "Increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education" by 2030. This objective is further broken down in two targets, namely to cut gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half (ensuring that at least 70% of Roma children participate in pre-school) and to reduce gap in upper secondary completion by at least one third (ensuring that the majority of Roma youth complete at least upper secondary education. While these targets are welcome, they overlook other relevant aspects for Roma education, training, and lifelong learning.

Encouragingly, the Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation of 12 March 2021 includes a much more comprehensive section on "Access to quality and inclusive mainstream education", which calls on Member States to "ensure that all Roma have effective equal access to and are able to participate in all forms and stages of education, from early childhood education and childcare to tertiary education, including second chance education, adult education, and lifelong learning". Access to education, training, and lifelong learning is also covered by the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar), chiefly in its Principle 1, while quality education is Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With this report, ERGO Network aims to provide data and strong grassroot evidence about Roma concerns, as well as good practices, regarding Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning in the selected Member States, in order to contribute to better policy-making and to inform the implementation of EU initiatives such as the Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation, the European Semester, the Social Pillar and its Action Plan, and the Union of Skills, among others). The findings of this report will also feed into advocacy around relevant policy initiatives at national level.

"I used to be afraid to send my daughter to school. But when I met the mediator, and she explained everything in our language, it changed everything."

Roma parent, Czech Republic

The umbrella term "Roma" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the European Commission.

METHODOLOGY

Between April and September 2025, ERGO Network researchers in **Bulgaria** (Integro Association), the **Czech Republic** (Life Together), **Hungary** (Autonómia Foundation), **Romania** (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities), **Slovakia** (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre) and **Spain** (Federation of Roma Association in Catalonia) prepared comprehensive national case studies about Roma access to quality and inclusive education in their country.

In **Bulgaria**, desk research of national and international relevant sources and statistics was complemented by a survey carried out within the framework of ROMACT in more than 30 municipalities across the country. This work was further enriched by focus groups in the community, individual interviews with community leaders, educational mediators, and representatives of local authorities.

Read Bulgaria's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

In the **Czech Republic**, the methodology combined qualitative field experience from direct work with Roma families and schools, carried out by the organisation in the Moravian-Silesian region, with a review of recent national research and monitoring, integrating data from recent studies. The findings reflect conditions in one of the country's most structurally excluded regions, while also referencing broader national trends.

Read the Czech Republic's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

In **Hungary**, analyses and case studies from recent years on the educational situation of Roma were collected and reviewed, complemented in some chapters by the experiences of relevant programmes of the Autonómia Foundation. The study relies mainly on national data, illustrated in some cases with specific local examples.

Read Hungary's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

In **Romania**, the research methodology combined desk research, the field experience of the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, and consultations with specialists in education and related fields. The analysis covers the entire country, drawing on national and international studies on Roma education. Although not recent, the available data from the last years show little variation.

Read Romania's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

In **Slovakia**, the research was based primarily on secondary analysis of documents, research studies, and public policies in the field of education. A key limitation is that educational statistics are not disaggregated by ethnicity, so available data relies on attributed ethnicity or the Atlas of Roma Communities. Instead, official categories often use the term "socially disadvantaged background," which also includes many Roma children. The desk research was complemented with insights drawn from the team's long-standing field experience in Roma education.

Read Slovakia's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

In **Spain**, the research combined desk analysis of national and European studies (e.g., by Fundación Secretariado Gitano, the Ministry of Social Rights, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and the Council of Europe) with qualitative input from Roma families, educators, and local professionals. The findings also build on FAGiC's long-standing field experience, ensuring a perspective that reflects both quantitative data and lived realities.

Read Spain's national case study on Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning here.

Additional input was provided for:

- The **Czech Republic**, by ERGO Network members Ara Art and RomanoNet.

Read Ara Art's supplementary case study on the Czech Republic here.

- **Ireland***, by ERGO Network members Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre.

Read Pavee Point submission on Roma and Traveller access to education in Ireland here.

- **Sweden**, by ERGO Network members Trajosko Drom.

Read Trajosko Drom's submission on Roma access to education in Sweden here.

The present report is a synthesis of the different national submissions, and it includes:

- A brief snapshot of the socio-economic situation of the Roma living in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.
- A detailed look at the Roma educational situation in the countries covered by the report, as well as at the obstacles that the Roma face in accessing quality and inclusive education in these countries.
- Concrete recommendations for improving the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and inclusiveness of education, training, and lifelong learning for Roma.

* The benchmarking exercise with Ireland throughout the report includes both indigenous Irish Travellers, as well as the Roma who arrived in Ireland over the past decades from other European countries, primarily from Eastern Europe. The number of Irish Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland was 32 949 at the 2022 census, while there are approximately 16 000 Roma currently living in the country. ERGO Network Irish member organisation Pavee Point has consistently advocated for named inclusion of both groups.

While the detailed secondary sources for all national data quoted in this report are mostly not included for brevity reasons, a complete list of all references used is available at the end of each of the six national case studies (linked above), or upon request.

This synthesis report was written by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network staff team in Brussels. It was endorsed by the participating researchers and national contributors in October 2025.

NATIONAL RESEARCHERS

Kamen Makaveev, expert for European programmes and projects, is affiliated with ***Integro Association*** **(Bulgaria)**, which brings together 12 local Roma civil society organisations from different parts of the country, united by their common goal to achieve an equal and respected position of the Roma community among the other members of Bulgarian society. Integro strives to give visibility to the problems and needs of the Roma from remote settlements.

The organisation's activities are aimed at community mobilisation and creating an active Roma leadership capable of challenging the passivity of both Roma and public authorities, so that they can share the responsibility for overcoming inequality, social exclusion and poverty among Roma, and for achieving cohesion and prosperity at the local level and in society as a whole. The association's guiding principles are the enforcement of human rights, democratic procedures, transparency, partnership and trust in the community and society.

For more information: www.integrobg.org/en

Mgr. Sri Kumar Vishwanathan is the Director of ***Vzájemné Soužití – Life Together*** **(Czech Republic)**. Founded in 1997 in Ostrava, the organisation works to improve the rights and living conditions of Roma communities, especially in structurally excluded localities.

Its activities focus on education, housing, employment, and social inclusion, with an emphasis on empowerment and intercultural dialogue. Vzájemné soužití has played a historic role in challenging school segregation, supporting Roma families in the D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic case, and continues to promote inclusive education and desegregation in the Moravian-Silesian Region.

For more information: www.vzajemnesouziti.cz

Tibor Béres and **Miklós Kóródi** are affiliated with the ***Autonómia Foundation*** **(Hungary)**, an independent, private foundation established in 1990 to strengthen civil society, support excluded groups and, above all, promote Roma integration. The work on the national case study was also supported by Nóra Gulyás.

The aim of Autonómia Foundation is to support the development of civil society in Hungary, including Roma integration. It does this primarily by supporting civic initiatives in which people mobilise local resources to achieve their goals. Since its establishment, the Foundation has supported and implemented hundreds of Roma inclusion programmes, participated in numerous research projects, and has an extensive network of contacts.

For more information: www.autonomia.hu

Florin Botonogu is the President of the ***Policy Center for Roma and Minorities*** **(Romania)**, a foundation that has been working on Roma inclusion in one of the most deprived areas of Bucharest for the past 12 years. PCRM is a founding member of ERGO Network.

The main focus of its intervention is on education, working with children from deprived communities through its flagship programme, the "Alternative Education Club," which combines remedial after-school support with alternative education in sports and arts. This helps around 100 Roma children from the Ferentari ghetto build both school performance and essential life skills such as teamwork, communication, and self-expression. Additionally, the foundation works on issues such as violence against Roma women, facilitates community access to social services, and mediates relations with local authorities.

For more information: www.policycenter.eu/en

Zuzana Havírová, PhD is the President of the ***Roma Advocacy and Research Centre*** **(Slovakia)**, a civil society organisation established in 2014, dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organisation contributes to the shaping of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalised localities.

The organisation focuses on supporting Roma community development through an inclusive approach, based on active cooperation between the minority and the majority population. RARC is based in Skalica, where it has built outstanding partnerships with various local actors, as well as being involved in national and international activities.

For more information: www.romadata.org

Bianca Elena Galusca is the Head of the European & International Area and the Participation & Youth Area at ***FAGiC – the Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia*** **(Spain)**. Founded in 1991, FAGiC is an umbrella organisation bringing together 96 local Roma associations across Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in the region.

Its mission is to defend and promote the rights of Roma people, fight antigypsyism and racism, advocate for equity in employment, housing, and youth participation, and channel Roma communities' voices by creating spaces for meaningful dialogue with mainstream society at both national and international levels.

For more information: www.fagic.org

SNAPSHOT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE ROMA IN SIX COUNTRIES

The six main countries participating in this research have some of the highest numbers of Roma residents in the European Union. In all of them, Roma communities are (among) the hardest hit population groups in what concerns **poverty, unemployment, social exclusion** and very poor overall socio-economic outcomes. This pre-existing state of dire inequality, on the backdrop of **widespread, historical antigypsyism**, was **made worse in recent years** by recent **spikes in cost of living and inflation**, the rise of the far right, an ongoing state of **warfare around Europe**, and corresponding **budget cuts for equality and inclusion** to prioritise competitiveness and defence.

In **Bulgaria**, the Roma are one of the most marginalised communities, often living in poverty and social isolation. Many face spatial segregation in neighbourhoods with deteriorated housing and lacking basic infrastructure such as water, sewerage, and transport. Unemployment is high, and those who do work often hold low-paid and unstable positions. The relative share of Roma at risk of poverty in 2022 is 63.2%, while those at risk of poverty and social exclusion reach 81.6% compared to 25% for persons from the Bulgarian ethnic group. 43.5% of Roma live in poor housing conditions, 76.9% in overcrowded housing, and 34.7% in homes without a toilet and bathroom inside. Over 70% of Roma children live in poor housing compared to less than 10% of non-Roma children. Many Roma children face segregated schools, high dropout rates, and a lack of Roma culture and language in curricula. Institutional discrimination and antigypsyism remain widespread, hindering access to public services, healthcare, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

In the **Czech Republic**, an estimated 250,000–300,000 Roma live, with around half residing in socially excluded localities marked by poor housing, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty. Educational outcomes remain a major barrier: nearly 10% of Roma do not complete primary school (compared to 0.12% in the general population), only 43.9% finish basic education, and just 30.1% hold a vocational qualification. In excluded areas, 68% of Roma have only basic or incomplete education, more than twice the rate of non-Roma. These disadvantages are reinforced by digital poverty, over-indebtedness, health disparities, and structural racism in schooling and employment pathways, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and mistrust toward public services.

In **Hungary**, the Roma population, which makes up around 6-8% of the total, is the poorest, most excluded, and most vulnerable group in society. Since the change of regime, the gap between Roma and the majority population has been widening, driven by residential segregation and exclusion in other areas of life, especially education. Their weak educational and labour market position sustains persistent and deepening poverty, reinforced by a negative, often hostile social climate marked by prejudice and discrimination. A significant proportion of Roma live in segregated settlements, where housing and living conditions are much worse than the national average and even compared to non-Roma neighbours. According to the EU-MIDIS II survey, 75% of Roma in Hungary live below the poverty line. Among young Roma aged 18–24, 68% leave school early, while a quarter of Roma aged 45 and older have not completed any level of formal education. Poverty rates are highest in areas where Roma are concentrated in segregated conditions, highlighting the link between exclusion and deprivation.

In **Romania**, around 80% of Roma live in poverty, facing some of the harshest socio-economic conditions in the country. Many lack basic utilities, with one in three Roma households having no access to water and one in ten without electricity. Segregation remains widespread: two-thirds of Roma live in all-Roma neighbourhoods, over half live in overcrowded housing, and many reside in informal or illegal settlements. Employment opportunities are scarce, with only one in four Roma over 16 earning a salary or running a business, while others depend on seasonal, grey, or black labour and migration. Health inequalities are stark, with limited access to healthcare despite worse health outcomes than the majority population; coverage from health mediators and community nurses is inadequate, and women's health, including reproductive health, requires urgent attention. Starting in September 2025, government crisis measures are expected to worsen access further. Roma also continue to experience systemic discrimination and strained relations with local authorities, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and marginalisation.

In **Slovakia**, according to the Atlas of Roma Communities, there are about 400,000 Roma, of which 46.5% live integrated among the majority population in similar socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in settlements within municipalities, 23.6% in settlements on the outskirts, and 18.4% in segregated communities. Most Roma are concentrated in the Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov regions, where the largest number of segregated Roma communities are located. The majority of these communities are rural, with a smaller proportion in urban areas. In these segregated and marginalised settings, multiple disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate, severely limiting social and economic opportunities.

In **Spain**, Roma communities continue to face severe inequality and widespread exclusion, particularly in education, employment, and decent housing. Over 80% of Roma live at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with children and youth being especially affected. Only 17% of Roma over age 16 have completed compulsory or higher education, and early school leaving affects around 86% of Roma youth—six times the national average. Roma women experience intersecting forms of discrimination that further limit access to education, employment, and social opportunities. Migrant Roma from Eastern Europe often face additional legal and language barriers, exacerbating socio-economic marginalisation. Housing conditions remain precarious, with many Roma living in irregular or informal situations, while labour market integration continues to be strongly affected by discrimination, social, and cultural factors.

ROMA ACCESS TO QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The broad consensus in all six countries covered in this report confirms that **learners continue to face systemic barriers to quality and inclusive education**, resulting in persistent gaps in enrolment, achievement, and attainment at all levels. **Access to early childhood education and care remains very limited,** with only a small fraction of Roma children under three enrolled, largely due to distance, cost, and lack of services near Roma communities.

Many Roma pupils continue to experience *segregated schooling and misplacement in special education*, practices that remain widespread despite legal prohibitions and years of policy commitments.

In mainstream schools, **the absence of bilingual support and mediators**, combined with low expectations and antigypsyism, further reduces learning outcomes. Roma language and culture are rarely included in curricula, and Roma representation among teachers and school staff is minimal.

Poverty remains a decisive factor behind early school leaving and low educational attainment, as **families struggle to cover indirect school costs** or rely on children's income. Parents working abroad often lack institutional support to maintain their children's attendance and performance. Many Roma students are steered into **low-prestige vocational tracks** or second-rate schools, with little opportunity to progress to higher education or academic pursuits. **Adult and lifelong learning opportunities remain scarce, inflexible, and disconnected** from real labour-market needs, while **digital exclusion continues to hinder** both students and learning adults.

Despite some positive trends, such as increased use of educational mediators, better data monitoring, and early desegregation initiatives, **most national education systems remain ill-equipped to ensure social mobility for Roma**. National Roma Strategic Frameworks acknowledge education as a top priority, yet rely heavily on short-term EU funding and lack clear accountability, measurable targets, or stable national budgets.

Quality and inclusive education is the foundation of Roma inclusion, as it determines access to employment, housing, health, and active citizenship. Without solid early education and equal opportunities throughout schooling, Roma children remain trapped in cycles of poverty and exclusion that persist into adulthood. **Inclusive, high-quality education is not only a right, but also a precondition for long-term Roma equality and social cohesion.**

The following chapters explore these realities in depth, highlighting both the persistent barriers and the promising practices identified across countries. They point to the urgent need to **invest in early childhood education**, ensure **truly inclusive and desegregated schooling**, and guarantee **equal access to quality teaching and learning for all Roma children**. They also underline the importance of **supporting parents and communities**, expanding **after-school and second-chance programmes**, improving **digital and language skills**, and promoting **Roma representation among teachers and education staff**. Finally, they stress that meaningful progress depends on **tackling poverty and antigypsyism**, ensuring that every Roma learner can grow and succeed in a school system that values equity, participation, and respect.

In **Bulgaria**, access to quality, inclusive education is considered central to Roma social mobility, as it allows Roma children to overcome poverty and exclusion and to participate fully in public life. Yet many still face segregation, underfunded schools, and low expectations.

In the **Czech Republic**, inclusive education is deemed essential for breaking intergenerational exclusion and poverty among Roma communities. Progress has been uneven: segregation, biased assessments, and low transitions to higher education persist. Community-led initiatives show that inclusion begins with trust, dignity, and cultural safety.

In **Hungary**, the greatest challenge, or the root of the problems, is territorial segregation and the lack of consistent and interrelated developments. It is pointless to provide additional financial resources to a segregated school, for example for modern educational technology equipment, if the teachers who use it are not prepared and motivated, and the children lack basic skills. Only complex, systemic development can solve the problem of inequality in education.

In **Romania**, it is felt that education remains the most effective means of Roma social integration, influencing access to work, health, and housing. For many Roma children, school is the only structured and supportive environment available. Beyond literacy and numeracy, education must nurture broader life skills and creativity through non-formal and vocational learning, offering Roma youth real pathways out of poverty and exclusion.

In **Slovakia,** inclusive education is recognised as vital to breaking stereotypes and strengthening social cohesion. Quality education benefits both Roma and society as a whole, improving interethnic relations, fostering social inclusion, and enhancing quality of life. Without equal educational opportunities, these broader social gains remain unattainable.

In **Spain,** access to quality, inclusive education is viewed as essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion faced by Roma communities. It improves academic and employment outcomes while promoting intercultural understanding. Inclusive, equitable education thus remains a cornerstone for building a fair and socially cohesive society.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

In all countries reviewed by this report, *most Roma children under the age of 3 are not enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC).*

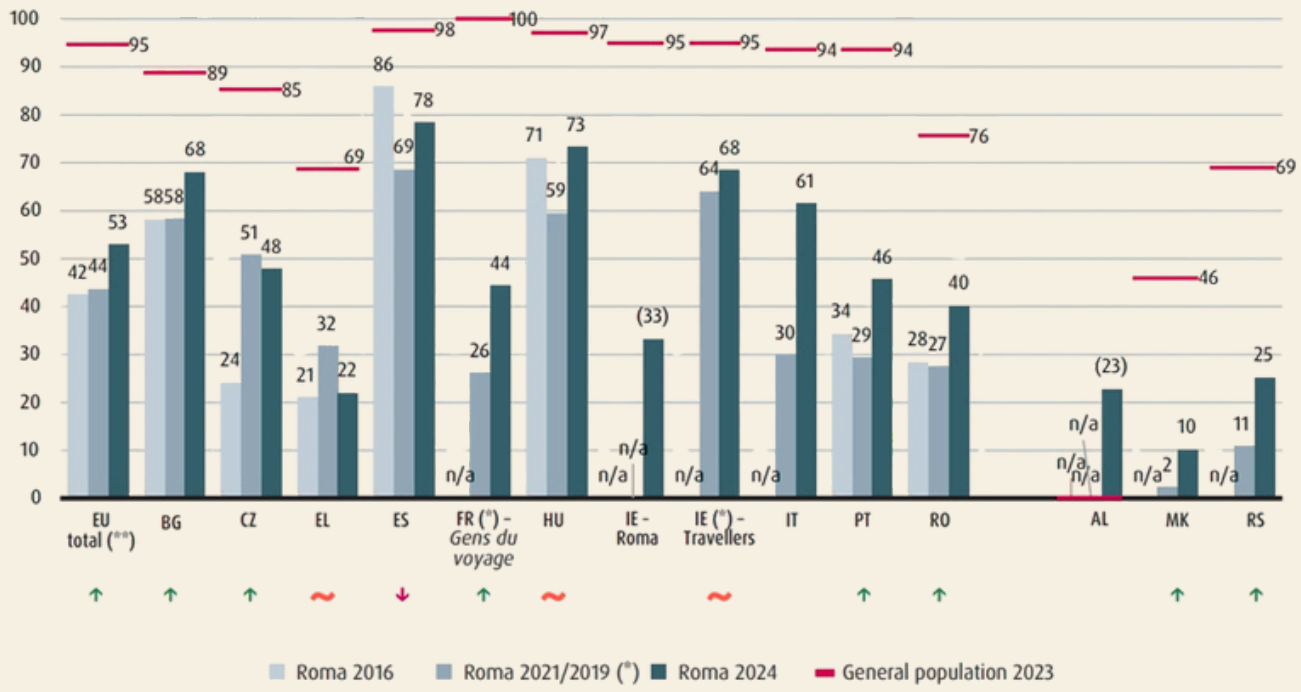
These participation rates lie far below the national average, with the widest gaps observed in rural and segregated areas. **Services are often unavailable in the communities where most Roma families live**, and even when facilities exist, hidden costs for food, clothing, hygiene products, or transport make them **effectively unaffordable**. Families in informal housing or without proper documentation also face **administrative barriers to enrolment**, leaving many children excluded from early learning opportunities. For the facilities operating near or in Roma communities, **quality and inclusiveness are uneven**, as they are marked by staff shortages, a lack of intercultural and anti-bias training, and the absence of bilingual or Roma mediators. This limits the capacity to respond to **Roma children's specific linguistic and cultural needs** and, as a result, many begin preschool already behind in language, social, and emotional development. **Promising community-based models**, such as family centres, mobile nurseries, or outreach programmes, are usually **short-term and cover only a small share of families** in need. **Sustained public investment in free, accessible, and culturally responsive early childhood education and care**, located close to Roma neighbourhoods and supported by trained bilingual staff, would represent a decisive step towards breaking cycles of early exclusion and disadvantage from the very start of life.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** requires Member States to enact measures that "ensure that all Roma have effective equal access to and are able to participate in all forms and stages of education, from early childhood education and childcare to tertiary education" and that "ensure access to quality early childhood education and care with special focus on early inclusion of Roma children, including disadvantaged Roma children."

In its most recent survey on the ***Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries,*** released in October 2025, the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** notes:

"Every second Roma/Traveller child (53%) attends early childhood education. Although there has been an improvement compared to 2016 (42%), this is still only about half of the proportion observed for children in the general population in the EU (95% in both 2023 and 2018). A positive trend is observed in most countries covered except for Spain, where Roma Survey 2024 data confirm the opposite trend to that indicated in the Roma Survey 2021."

FIGURE 13: CHILDREN AGED BETWEEN THREE YEARS AND THE STARTING AGE FOR COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION WHO ATTEND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2024; Roma Survey 2021; Roma and Travellers Survey 2019, EU-MIDIS II 2016; Eurostat dataset educ_uoe_enra21.

In **Bulgaria**, civil society estimates suggest that less than 20% of Roma under 3 attend ECEC, and only about two-thirds of Roma children aged 4-6 are enrolled. There are no nurseries or kindergartens in or near many Roma neighbourhoods, and access to those that exist is hindered by long distances, unsafe routes, and irregular transport. Further obstacles relate to parental poverty and the mounting costs of food, hygiene items, supplies, and documents. Facilities near Roma areas often lack equipment, outdoor spaces and libraries, and rarely employ bilingual specialists or mediators on stable contracts. This leads to language and cultural gaps, as few staff speak Romani and they have limited multicultural training, while services are not designed around Roma needs. In turn, this yields limited trust and parental engagement.

In the **Czech Republic**, Roma children's access to early childhood education and care remains critically low, with only about one-third enrolled in preschool, compared to over 80% in the majority population. Families in excluded localities face a shortage of nearby nurseries, unaffordable hidden costs for food and clothing, and discriminatory enrolment practices. The public system lacks sufficient capacity and long-term funding, instead relying on short-term NGO projects. Cultural barriers and mistrust further reduce participation, while the absence of bilingual staff prevents Romani-speaking children from catching up linguistically before school. Sustained state investment in affordable, inclusive early education close to Roma communities is needed.

The Brouček early childhood programme is operated by Vzájemné soužití in the Liščina district, one of Ostrava's most excluded neighbourhoods. It targets 2-3-year-old children and their caregivers, offering daily early learning activities. The environment is culturally safe, relationship-based, and community-run. It focuses on language development, play, routine-building, and emotional readiness for school. The programme has been acclaimed by Roma parents, early childhood experts (e.g., those involved in the Včasná péče platform), and local headteachers, who report that children from Brouček are consistently accepted into mixed kindergartens, entering with greater confidence and stronger skills, thereby increasing their chances of long-term educational success. The Brouček model illustrates how early investment, trust, and cultural embeddedness can interrupt cycles of exclusion from the earliest age.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In Hungary, the ECEC system for ages 0–3 operates through day nurseries (bölcsőde / mini bölcsőde), family/office nurseries, and Sure Start Children's Houses (SSCHs). Reliable Roma-specific enrolment data are scarce, but SSCH managers estimate reaching about half of Roma children in their catchment areas. However, many remote or segregated communities remain unreached. Barriers include missing facilities in disadvantaged settlements, staff shortages (psychologists, special educators), and segregated parallel offers (the SSCHs are not integrated with mainstream pathways). Quality varies widely, while political and funding dynamics dictate where centres open, rather than real needs on the ground. Affordability is an issue, as nurseries charge fees (even if some apply means-tested discounts), and SSCHs are free but carry associated transport costs.

Between 2019 and 2023, Autonómia Foundation participated in the monitoring and evaluation of the Endless Possibilities ('Végtelen lehetőség') EU-funded programme. In this context, it visited a municipality in northern Hungary with a population of about 1 800 people, almost entirely Roma. The settlement has five segregated areas (three larger and two smaller), or more precisely, Roma settlements. Around 2015, a 'Biztos kezdet Gyerekház' (Sure Start Children's House) was launched on the outskirts of the first settlement. Women began to bring their children there. Over the next four years, two more buildings with similar functions were built in the same area, about 100 metres. This is due to the fact that the Fidesz party Member of Parliament, who has virtually absolute power in the district, decides on the use of various development funds. Professional considerations, such as the fact that similar institutions are needed in other settlements in this district, or that their operation would be even more justified in other poor condition areas in the same municipality, do not play a role in the allocation of development funds.

Hungary

In **Romania**, Roma participation in pre-primary education remains very low, with official estimates pointing to a third of Roma children aged 3–5 enrolled, and those aged 0–3 even less. Infrastructure is lacking in many Roma communities, while existing educational establishments vary in quality and entail prohibitive costs for clothing, supplies, and transportation, making these services de facto unaffordable. The absence of nearby affordable nurseries limits both Roma women's employment opportunities as well as their children's early linguistic and social development. Three-quarters of Roma children who later drop out have never attended kindergarten, underlining the importance of early years. Facilities rarely offer bilingual or culturally responsive approaches, and the use of Roma educational mediators is sporadic. Policy plans to remedy the situation are at early stages, and progress is incremental.

In **Spain**, about 62% of all children 0–3 attend ECEC, but only less than 20% of Roma children of the same age do so The main barriers are financial (as typical fees range from €150 – €400 per month, despite subsidies), geographic (insufficient public nursery places in peri-urban and rural zones with Roma families), and administrative (proof-of-residence is a hurdle for Roma living in precarious housing). Centres in Roma-concentrated areas are often under-resourced, with few intercultural staff, mediators or adapted activities. As a result, many Roma children start primary school lagging behind in language, motor and social skills. NGO-led family early-learning groups show strong engagement, but remain small-scale and underfunded.

In **Slovakia**, formal ECEC for under 2s is an extremely rare system-wide (capacity for ~1.9% of all children), and in marginalised Roma communities, nursery attendance was ~1.6%, far below the EU average of 35%. Cultural norms and parental allowance (until age 3) favour home care, but structural barriers dominate: shortages of places, distance to facilities, and costs. For ages 3–5, enrolment among Roma children from marginalised communities rose to ~32% (vs 87% in the general population), with younger ages (3–4) especially under-represented. The time these children spent in kindergarten is also shorter, suggesting weaker inclusion. Facilities near MRC areas often lack capacity, specialists and stable assistants, while few staff speak Romani. Even after pre-primary education becomes mandatory at 5 years old, thousands of Roma children remain outside the system, given availability, affordability and accessibility barriers.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, engagement with ECEC among Roma and Traveller children remains fragile and inconsistent. While enrolments rose sharply between 2015 and 2019, it declined again by over a quarter by 2021. Transition rates from preschool to primary school remain worryingly low: only 64.7% for Roma and 74% for Travellers, compared to 92.3% for the general population. Barriers to early educational access include poverty, housing insecurity, and discrimination. The *Equal Start Model* commits to increase the uptake rates by Traveller and Roma children andbring it closer to the national average by 2028.

FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

In most of the countries reviewed (with the partial exception of Hungary), **financial barriers remain a major obstacle** preventing Roma children and youth from fully exercising their right to quality and inclusive education.

Despite formal free access to compulsory schooling, *hidden costs* - such as school meals, transport, school supplies, clothing, books, digital devices, and extracurricular fees - continue to *exclude the poorest families from accessing educational opportunities.*

These costs often accumulate at transition points, notably from primary to secondary or higher education, where accommodation and living expenses further deepen inequalities. **Girls and young people from remote rural areas are particularly affected**, as families under severe financial strain are frequently forced to prioritise which children can continue studying. Measures such as universal free school meals, targeted stipends, and the removal of bureaucratic hurdles to financial aid have proven effective when implemented. Yet, in most cases, these **initiatives remain project-based, underfunded, or geographically limited**, leaving the majority of Roma families to cope alone with the financial burden of "free" education. Ensuring that education is truly cost-free and accessible to Roma children, therefore, requires both structural investment and **sustained income support**, alongside community outreach and anti-stigma measures that guarantee equal take-up.

The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** calls on Member States to "ensure effective equal access to [...] all stages of education", to "overcome all discrimination, inequality and disadvantages in terms of educational opportunities, outcomes and attainment", including, explicitly, through "financial support schemes".

In **Bulgaria**, although public education is formally free, poverty continues to impose decisive limits on the schooling of Roma children. Many families cannot afford school supplies, shoes, or appropriate clothing, while transportation and food costs are prohibitive for pupils studying outside their locality. Roma parents in precarious situations are often forced to decide which child can stay in school, with girls typically the first to drop out. In higher education, fees, accommodation, and textbooks remain unaffordable, even in state universities that charge reduced rates. Scholarship schemes exist but are difficult to access, due to performance criteria or a lack of information. Without comprehensive income support and targeted subsidies, financial hardship remains a leading driver of Roma educational exclusion.

In the **Czech Republic**, high and hidden education costs continue to limit Roma children's access to quality schooling. Families spend between 6 700 and 9 100 CZK at the beginning of the school year on supplies, transportation, and meals for a first grader, which is often a cost that is impossible to meet for households reliant on social benefits or informal work. Even with initiatives such as free school meals (Obědy zdarma) and government stipends (14 000 – 21 000 CZK), coverage remains inconsistent and bureaucratically difficult to access. Travel costs prevent children from attending better-quality, non-segregated schools that are further away, thereby reinforcing local educational and spatial segregation.

"Some children are kept home due to the inability to afford shoes, proper clothing, or lunch fees, while others leave secondary education because of the cost of commuting. The organization Vzájemné soužití supports over 35 secondary and university Roma students, by having its field staff help Roma families navigate administrative processes, secure documents, and maintain communication with schools, which for many is the decisive factor enabling them to continue their education."

Social worker, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, public education is free of charge. The proliferation of private and church-run schools has become a tool for segregation, as Roma families cannot afford the private fees and are often excluded from such schools. While textbooks are free and transport is subsidised, the cost of meals can be a burden; however, they are free for disadvantaged pupils in primary school and discounted by 50% in secondary school. Overall, it is assessed that there are no significant financial obstacles to public education and vocational training, with the primary barriers being systemic segregation rather than direct costs.

In **Romania**, poverty is the main cause of early school leaving among Roma children, as the additional costs incurred by free, public education remain unaffordable for most families. Expenses for food, transport, clothing, and school supplies weigh heavily on households where nearly 80% live at risk of poverty. Research by Nevo Parudimos found that financial hardship accounts for school dropout in the vast majority of Roma cases. While NGOs and charities provide small-scale assistance, these initiatives are local and temporary. Experts have long advocated for a national programme to support families who cannot meet educational expenses, recognising that without such structural measures, equal access remains unattainable.

In **Slovakia**, everyday school-related expenses continue to represent a serious obstacle to Roma education. Even at the primary level, families struggle to cover the cost of stationery, gym clothing, and hygiene items, while lunch fees often prevent regular attendance. Although subsidies exist for school meals, their implementation can stigmatise children from poor households. At higher levels, travel, accommodation, and materials are major expenses that discourage continuation.

Community organisations report that Roma students frequently depend on ad-hoc support from friends and family to afford essential items such as laptops or textbooks. More inclusive and non-stigmatising financial aid mechanisms are needed to ensure equal participation in education for all Roma learners.

A Roma university student had three siblings, and his parents could not afford to buy him a laptop, which he needed for his studies. He didn't need money for food or transportation because he occasionally worked at construction sites and various events. However, the money he earned was not enough to also cover the laptop. The staff of an NGO supporting him had to all chip in to cover the cost.

Slovakia

In **Spain**, education is tuition-free at all levels, but the indirect costs of schooling (reaching €300–600 per child per year) remain a decisive factor in Roma educational exclusion, including meals, transport, books, clothing, digital devices, and extracurricular activities. This is unaffordable for families where over half have no stable income, and 86% live at risk of poverty.

Partial subsidies for school meals or transport fail to cover the full need, leading to absenteeism and early dropout, especially in secondary education. Tertiary education remains especially inaccessible for many Roma students due to substantial per-credit enrolment fees, which can reach €1,200 annually, compounded by the high costs of accommodation, transport, and administrative barriers.

NON-FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

A wide range of **non-financial barriers continues to undermine the equal participation of Roma children and youth in quality education**, as revealed by evidence from all countries in this report. These barriers include territorial isolation, insufficient or poor-quality educational infrastructure, language obstacles, segregation, inadequate teacher preparation, inadequate housing, and weak cooperation between schools and Roma families.

Many Roma children must *travel long distances* to attend school, often without safe or affordable transport, while others study in *under-resourced institutions* that concentrate poverty and disadvantage.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** urges Member States to "work towards overcoming all discrimination, inequality and disadvantages in terms of educational opportunities, outcomes and attainment."

In **Bulgaria,** territorial isolation and the lack of educational infrastructure in Roma neighbourhoods remain among the most serious obstacles to equal access. Many Roma settlements, especially in small towns and villages, have no school within walking distance, and children must travel unsafe or poorly lit roads to reach one.

Secondary education is seldom available locally, forcing pupils to commute long distances or move away from home. The quality of education in schools attended predominantly by Roma children is often lower due to limited resources, insufficient specialists, and a shortage of trained teachers. Language barriers affect many Roma pupils for whom Bulgarian is not the mother tongue, while parental engagement remains weak, largely due to social exclusion and lack of outreach from schools.

"A significant share of teachers lacks the necessary pedagogical and methodological preparation to work effectively with Roma children."
Social worker, Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, discrimination and low expectations from teachers are the main obstacles to Roma inclusion in education. Studies show that two-thirds of teachers associate Roma identity with social exclusion, and 92% lack training for work with disadvantaged pupils. Roma children face frequent bullying and stigma, and nearly one in four reports being harassed because of their ethnicity. Families' distrust of schools, rooted in prior experiences of exclusion, often leads to irregular attendance or avoidance of mainstream schools. Some promising local initiatives, such as community mediators and intercultural education pilots, show that inclusive practices can work, but they remain the exception rather than the rule.

In **Hungary**, systemic segregation, low-quality schooling in disadvantaged areas, and limited early childhood participation all contribute to lower Roma attendance and completion rates. Many Roma children begin primary school without sufficient preparation, as attendance in kindergarten is irregular and adaptation is difficult due to cultural and emotional factors. Teachers often lack adequate training to address socio-cultural disadvantage or learning difficulties, while access to specialists such as psychologists or speech therapists is scarce. Overcrowded homes and poor housing conditions hinder study, and frequent absences further reduce achievement. In vocational education, discrimination by employers, limited training placements, and low aspirations linked to poverty prevent Roma youth from completing studies or accessing skilled work. Despite some progress with scholarships, structural inequalities persist across the system.

In **Romania**, the schools attended by Roma children do not provide the same quality of education, nor do they benefit from the same supply of adequately trained teachers, as schools attended by majority children. Teachers often avoid postings in poor or rural areas, leading to understaffed institutions with limited pedagogical capacity. Incentives and professional training for teachers working with disadvantaged pupils remain insufficient. In rural communities, deteriorating infrastructure and inadequate heating make schools unattractive or unsafe, while in cities, the limited number of kindergartens restricts early enrolment. Weak connections between education and the labour market also reduce motivation to continue schooling, especially among adolescents.

In **Slovakia**, administrative and structural barriers continue to affect Roma educational pathways, from enrolment to tertiary studies. Application procedures and documentation requirements can be discouraging, especially for students from marginalised communities. The absence of nearby secondary schools in Roma settlements is not itself negative, as establishing such institutions could deepen segregation, and past attempts to localise secondary education in Roma areas resulted in long-term isolation, rather than integration. Systemic support for the inclusion of Roma learners in mainstream schools remains weak. Creating opportunities for Roma students to attend mixed, high-quality schools and supporting their transition to higher education are essential to counter segregation and exclusion.

In **Spain**, non-financial barriers are rooted in geographical isolation, unequal school quality, institutional rigidity, language barriers, and weak intercultural engagement. Roma families living in urban peripheries or rural areas often have limited access to nearby schools or face long and costly commutes. Schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are typically under-resourced, with high teacher turnover and few support services, such as tutoring or counselling. Even minor administrative requirements, such as proof of residence, can exclude families in precarious housing. Despite public initiatives to combat segregation, many Roma children remain concentrated in low-performing schools, perpetuating cycles of inequality.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Sweden**, many Roma children live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with predominantly first- and second-generation immigrants, where schools are under-resourced (not in numbers or materially in comparison to other schools, but with regards to having to respond to more challenging circumstances), and therefore less able to provide adequate targeted support.

EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVING AND YOUNG ROMA NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, OR TRAINING (NEETS)

In the countries reviewed, **early school leaving and the high proportion of young Roma not in employment, education, or training (NEETs)** remain critical challenges undermining equal access to education and lifelong learning.

Roma children are several times more likely than their non-Roma peers to drop out before completing secondary education, while Roma youth are *vastly overrepresented among NEETs, particularly young women*, who face the combined impact of poverty, gender inequality, and caregiving responsibilities.

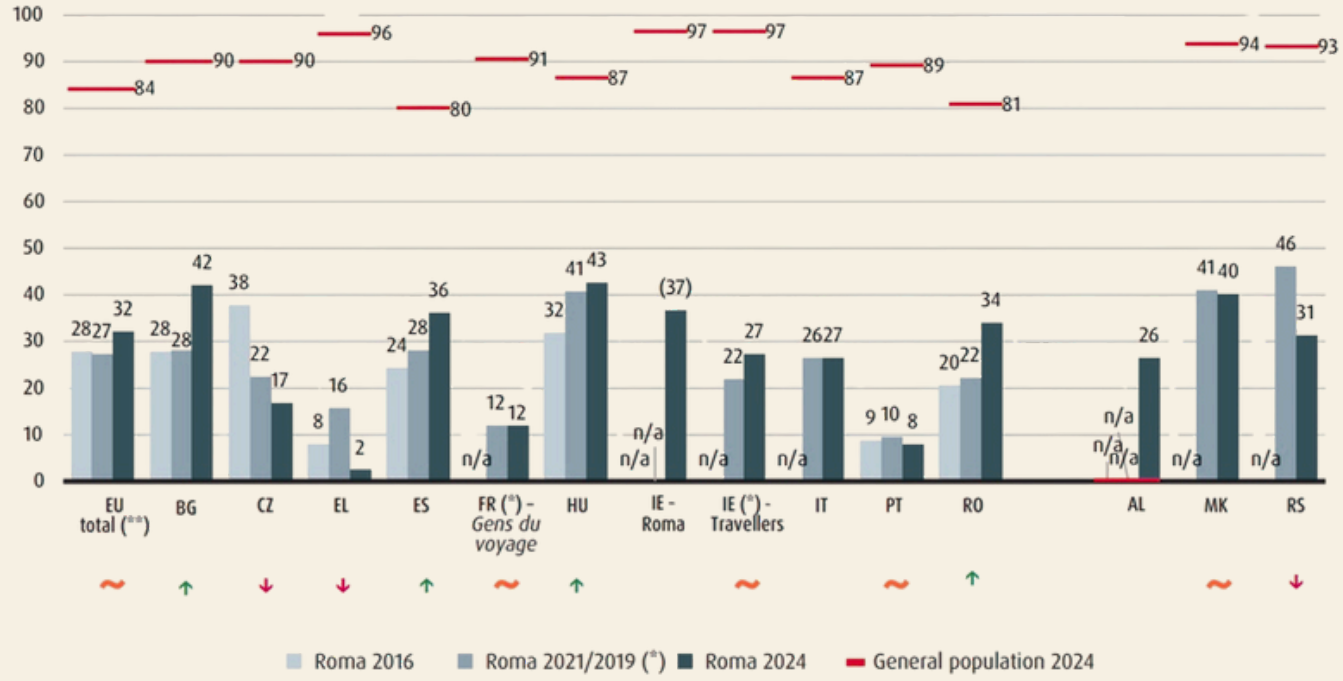
Economic hardship at home, discrimination in schools, poor-quality and segregated education, lack of guidance and mentoring, and weak institutional support all contribute to these outcomes. **Poverty remains the most pervasive driver of early school leaving among Roma**, as families struggling to meet basic needs often depend on children's income or are unable to afford the direct and indirect costs of continued education. In other cases, **Roma students lose motivation** when schooling appears disconnected from real employment prospects, or when negative experiences at school reinforce **feelings of discrimination and exclusion**. Tackling these issues requires a coordinated approach linking education, social protection, and employment services, with targeted scholarships, mentoring, and community-based outreach.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to "take measures to prevent early school leaving and drop-out at all levels of education, with a specific focus on Roma girls, for example through cooperation between schools, mediators and social protection services", and to "ensure smooth transitions between educational levels [...] through career guidance, counselling, mentoring, and financial support schemes."

In its most recent survey on the ***Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries***, released in October 2025, the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** notes:

"Only 32% of Roma/Travellers aged 20–24 have completed at least upper secondary education; this marks little change in comparison with 2016 (28%). In the general EU-27 population, this rate was 84% in both 2024 and 2018. In Czechia, Greece and Serbia, the share is decreasing, while in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Spain, it is increasing. In the remaining countries, the situation has not changed.

FIGURE 14: PEOPLE AGED 20–24 WHO COMPLETED AT LEAST UPPER-SECONDARY EDUCATION, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2024; Roma Survey 2021; Roma and Travellers Survey 2019, EU-MIDIS II 2016; Eurostat dataset edat_lfse_03.

In **Bulgaria**, early school leaving among Roma children and youth is one of the most acute problems in education, with unofficial estimates indicating dropout rates nearly six times higher than those of non-Roma. Around 60% of Roma children leave school before completing secondary education, and less than 20% finish it. Over 65% of Roma aged 18–24 are NEETs, with young women particularly affected. Poverty, the need to contribute to family income, early marriage, and discrimination in schools are the main drivers. Roma boys often drop out to work in seasonal or informal jobs, while Roma girls frequently leave school due to early marriage and childbearing. Segregated, under-resourced schools also reduce motivation, and experiences of bias or bullying reinforce disengagement. The widespread phenomenon of educated Roma who are forced into low-level jobs discourages younger generations from pursuing higher education.

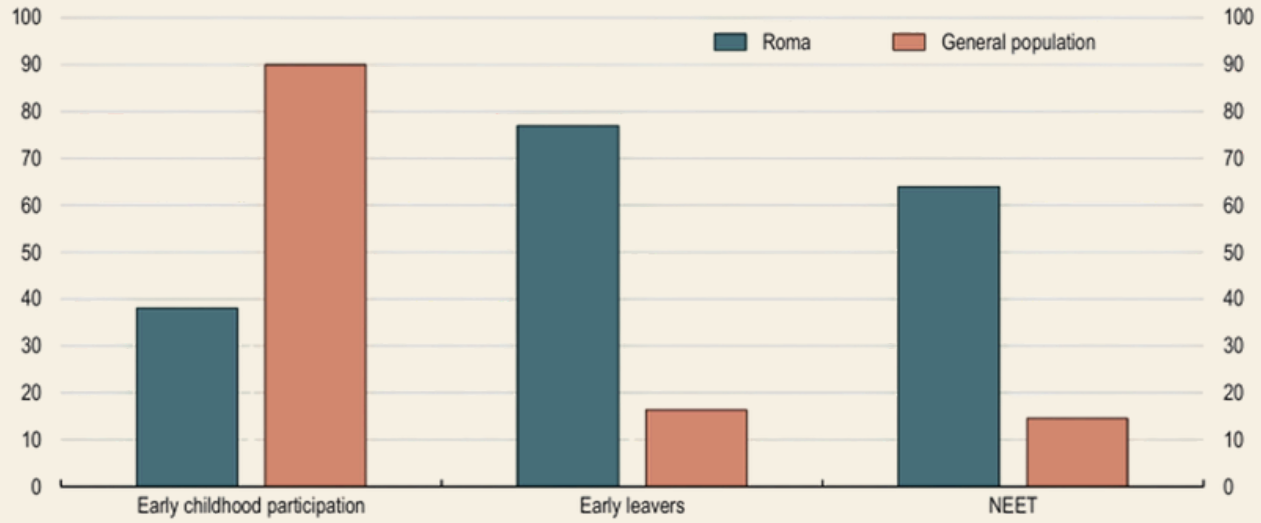
In the **Czech Republic**, early school leaving among Roma remains widespread, driven by poverty, discrimination, and the poor quality of segregated schools. About half of Roma young people are NEETs, and many drop out during lower secondary education, with Roma girls particularly affected. Causes include poor preparation in segregated or underperforming primary schools, financial stress, low expectations, and a lack of guidance during educational transitions. NGOs report some positive results from mentoring and tutoring programmes, yet systemic solutions to reduce dropout and NEET rates remain absent, and most measures are short-term.

In **Hungary**, school dropout and youth disengagement from education and work remain widespread among Roma, particularly in rural regions. About 62% of Roma aged 18–24 are early school leavers, compared to 12% in the general population, while over half of Roma youth aged 15–29 are NEETs. Poverty, segregation, and discrimination persist as key drivers. Roma girls are at heightened risk of leaving school after primary education, often due to early motherhood or unsafe environments. Regional disparities are stark: dropout is lowest in Budapest but highest in Northern Hungary. Addressing the issue requires sustained investment in inclusive education, mentoring and scholarship schemes, flexible schooling options for young mothers, and positive role models to encourage Roma girls to remain in education.

In **Romania**, early school leaving and NEET rates among Roma remain among the highest in the EU, reflecting deep structural inequalities. Eight in ten Roma children leave school early, while 63% of young Roma are neither in education, employment, nor training. Roma girls are particularly affected, facing both cultural and economic barriers. Poverty, discrimination, and distance to schools continue to drive dropout, and rural schools often lack adequate infrastructure and qualified teachers with adequate training. Although the Recovery and Resilience Facility provided for some investment in dropout prevention, resources remain insufficient, and second-chance programmes in rural areas are scarce. Recent governmental proposals to restrict access to social scholarships risk exacerbating Roma dropout rates. Sustained investment, targeted outreach, and more Roma community mediators are essential to reverse current trends.

Figure 3.14. A large number of Roma children are not engaged in education

% of individuals in each group



Note: Early childhood participation refers to children from 4 to compulsory school age; early leavers count for those aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in education (or training); Neither in Employment nor in Education or Training rate (NEET) refers to the 15 to 24 years (Eurostat).
Source: EU (2016), Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma – Selected findings, European Union, Agency for Fundamental Rights; EU-SILC (2017) EU-LFS (2017/18); PISA.

In **Slovakia**, two-thirds of young people from marginalised Roma communities are neither in education nor in employment, compared to only 12% in the general population. Among graduates of segregated or special schools, the rate rises to 80%. Early school leaving is particularly high among Roma girls, with three-quarters of whom become NEETs by early adulthood. Key contributing factors for this situation include poverty, segregated schooling, misplacement in special education, and a lack of guidance and family support. Low parental education levels and discrimination of Roma on the labour market further perpetuate the disengagement felt by Roma youth. Breaking this cycle requires comprehensively tackling poverty and segregation, ensuring access to quality mainstream education, and supporting Roma girls through mentoring, counselling, and targeted outreach.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, school retention among Roma and Traveller pupils remains critically low. For the 2016 Traveller cohort entering post-primary education, only 72% completed the Junior Cycle (the first three years of secondary school). Even fewer, just 31.4%, went on to sit the Leaving Certificate, the national exam at the end of secondary education. In contrast, 91.7% of the general population complete the Leaving Certificate. For the first time, Roma students were included in the 2017 cohort retention rate, marking a positive development - 92.7% of this cohort completed the three-year Junior Cycle, with 86.8% sitting the Junior Certificate examination. However, only 58.9% sat the Leaving Certificate examination.

In **Sweden**, around one third of Roma pupils leave education with only basic schooling, and about 30% do not continue to upper secondary or vocational education. Roma youth remain severely underrepresented at both secondary and tertiary levels.

In **Spain**, early school leaving among Roma youth remains alarmingly high, with around 86% of Roma students leaving school before completing secondary education, compared to just 13% nationally. The NEET rate among Roma aged 15–24 exceeds 60%, with Roma girls disproportionately affected due to gendered expectations, caregiving responsibilities, and early marriage in some cases. Poverty, housing instability, and discrimination in schools all contribute to a progressive disconnect between Roma and education. Limited access to flexible educational pathways and the scarcity of Roma mediators exacerbate the problem. Promising practices include mentorship initiatives and culturally relevant curricula, particularly those focusing on Roma girls. Broader expansion of these programmes and sustained institutional support are needed to ensure that Roma youth can complete education and transition into decent work.

EDUCATIONAL MEDIATORS AND LEARNING ASSISTANCE

Across all six countries, **targeted support measures for Roma learners of all ages are largely underdeveloped and inconsistently funded**. Provisions that have proven effective include **educational mediators**, teaching assistants, language support, after-school tutoring, homework clubs, and mentoring schemes, which have not only fostered attendance but also built trust between families and schools. However, **most such initiatives depend on short-term civil society projects**, sometimes with EU funds, rather than stable national budgets and programmes. **Roma educational mediators play a critical role** in bridging schools and Roma families; however, the lack of systemic planning and funding, as well as professional recognition, leaves Roma education mediators and assistants in precarious positions, undermining their continuity and impact. **Bilingual and culturally responsive teaching**, as well as tailored support for second-chance learners and Roma girls, **remain limited**. To ensure equal participation and learning outcomes, stable public funding, trained bilingual staff, and integrated after-school support are urgently needed.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to implement "measures to support the equal participation and active engagement of all pupils, including children with disabilities, in mainstream educational activities and processes", to "provide individualised support and mediation to compensate for linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps, and "to prevent early school leaving [...] for example through cooperation between schools, mediators and social protection services.

In **Bulgaria**, educational mediators have become an established component of inclusive education, but they are still insufficiently supported. Initially developed through NGO initiatives, the role has been funded by the state since 2018, with an estimated 800–900 mediators currently active in schools with high numbers of vulnerable pupils. Mediators are vital for maintaining communication between schools and families, yet most work on temporary contracts without secure funding. They are often the only support for children and parents whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. After-school and homework support are offered mainly through NGO or local projects, but these are uneven and lack long-term sustainability.

In the **Czech Republic**, educational mediators and assistants play an indispensable role in building bridges between Roma families and schools. Their work improves attendance and communication, yet positions remain project-based and underfunded, with no national system for stable employment or accreditation. Only about 30% of schools with high Roma enrolment employ mediators, despite clear evidence of impact, such as a 33% reduction in absenteeism in pilot programmes. Continuous tutoring, homework help, and after-school activities provided by NGOs help close learning gaps, but the lack of state responsibility keeps such support fragile.

Vzájemné Soužití has worked with multiple kindergartens and primary schools (e.g. MŠ Špálova, ZŠ Bohumínská) to introduce Roma teaching assistants and community-based inclusion workers. These professionals foster trust between schools and families, monitor attendance and address absences promptly, help teachers understand cultural contexts, and empower Roma children to feel seen, supported, and capable. Parents in these schools report feeling more welcomed, and headteachers note that attendance, classroom atmosphere, and parent-school cooperation have improved.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, school mediators are not widely used, and most targeted support for Roma learners is delivered through "tanoda" community centres, which are civil society-run initiatives to reduce educational inequalities, particularly for Roma. These provide after-school tutoring, mentoring, and social support for disadvantaged children, but they depend on short-term EU or state project funding.

Language support is limited, as bilingual teaching is not part of the education system, leaving Roma children to adapt without structured help. Improving cooperation between tanodas and mainstream schools, alongside stable funding and teacher training in inclusive methods, would greatly enhance support for Roma pupils.

The creation of the tanoda *system is based on the recognition that the "traditional" school system does not adequately address the specific needs of disadvantaged and Roma students. Tanodas attempt to fill this gap by providing personalised, student-centred support through an alternative approach. The first tanodas were established in the early 2000s through civil society initiatives. After 2010, their operations became increasingly tied to state and EU funding sources (e.g., EFOP projects). According to the Tanoda Platform 2025 report, in 2023, a total of 188 state-funded tanodas were operating in Hungary, serving 5 409 students, most of whom were in primary school. On average, each tanoda served 20–30 children. Approximately 70% of tanodas are maintained by nonprofit organisations, while 28% are operated by churches or church-affiliated nonprofits.*

Hungary

In **Romania**, school mediators link Roma families with educational institutions, but their number and job security depend on local budgets or project funding. Training and evaluation of their work remain limited. Language support is largely absent, as Roma children rarely receive structured help in transitioning from Romanes to Romanian instruction. After-school and homework programmes exist in some schools and NGOs, providing tutoring and supervision for disadvantaged pupils, but coverage is patchy and continuity uncertain. Institutionalising mediators and ensuring sustained funding for after-school support would significantly improve Roma educational outcomes.

In **Slovakia**, teaching assistants and mediators help Roma pupils overcome linguistic and social barriers. Yet, their employment depends mainly on EU-funded projects, leading to gaps between funding cycles and unequal coverage. Not all teaching assistants speak Romani, leaving children without adequate language support at the start of their schooling. Bilingual or mother-tongue teaching is not available, and communication barriers persist in early education. After-school tutoring and support activities are organised mainly through NGOs within specific projects and end when funding expires, underscoring the need for systemic, state-funded inclusion mechanisms.

In **Spain**, educational mediators are often employed by NGOs or local councils, and they play a crucial role in bridging the gap between schools and Roma families. However, like in all other countries, their positions are not formally recognised or publicly funded permanently. Language support is limited, particularly for migrant Roma children who struggle with Spanish or Catalan in the early years, as there are no structured bilingual programmes. After-school tutoring and mentoring, provided by organisations such as the Pere Closa Foundation, improve attendance and motivation but remain reliant on short-term projects. Integrating mediators and after-school schemes into the public education system would ensure greater continuity and reach.

The Pere Closa Foundation *was born from the will of a group of young Roma men and women, with the support of institutions and allies, to motivate members of our community to become the protagonists of our own future. One of the Foundation's goals is to strengthen the role of the cultural mediator. Through its main programme,* Siklavipen Savorença – Education for All, *it supports the regular schooling of Roma children by providing after-school tutoring, working with families, and coordinating with schools and teachers.*

Barcelona, Spain

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, the concept of educational mediators is not used, but community link workers in Ireland who connect local communities with services and support, often focusing on social inclusion, integration, and specific needs like education for Traveller and Roma children. There is ongoing investment by the Government in targeted initiatives for Travellers and Roma. However, despite policy commitments to equality and inclusion, educational outcomes for these groups remain significantly lower than for the general population. For Roma, inconsistent recognition in policy means their needs are sometimes overlooked altogether.

In **Sweden**, some municipalities employ Roma mediators to strengthen school attendance, facilitate parent–school dialogue, and build trust. These practices show positive impact, but remain project-based, fragmented, and without adequate national funding or coordination, apart from Roma bridge-builder training programs commissioned and financed by the Government.

SUPPORTING ROMA PARENTS TO SUPPORT ROMA LEARNERS

The consensus in all countries covered was that Roma parents continue to face *severe socio-economic barriers that limit their ability to support their children's education*. Poverty, unstable employment, overcrowded housing, and poor health conditions make it difficult for families to provide the environment, time, and resources children need to learn.

Social assistance schemes are often minimal, conditional, or punitive, reducing rather than reinforcing educational continuity. In many cases, parents who themselves experienced segregation or early school leaving **lack trust in schools and confidence** in engaging with teachers. Meanwhile, support for **children whose parents work abroad is rarely systematic**, and where it exists, it is limited to isolated local or pilot programmes. Genuine parental empowerment requires holistic approaches that address **income security, housing, healthcare, and inclusive parental engagement**, ensuring that families can act as equal partners in education.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to "encourage effective parental involvement in the education of Roma pupils and foster links between the schools and local communities", as well as to "acknowledge the vulnerability of children whose parents have gone abroad and to providing priority access to after-school and individualised support."

In **Bulgaria**, most Roma parents struggle to support their children's education due to persistent poverty and low social protection. Around two-thirds of Roma families live below the poverty line, and benefits barely cover subsistence needs. Social assistance is tied to school attendance, meaning families can lose income when children miss classes, which is a policy that deepens rather than alleviates hardship. Educational mediators help parents engage with schools, but outreach remains limited. There are no national programmes addressing children whose parents work abroad, which means that many of these children are cared for by relatives, who do not receive benefits, training, guidance, or respite care.

"Meaningful parental involvement in a child's education is difficult when the family is fighting daily for survival. Unfortunately, poor families do not receive the full social support they need from the state."

Social worker, Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, Roma parents receive little institutional support to help their children succeed in school. Poverty, poor housing, and unstable jobs make it difficult to afford supplies or ensure regular attendance. Parents working abroad often lack assistance to maintain their children's schooling. Some families still mistrust educational institutions, shaped by past experiences of discrimination. Initiatives by NGOs and mediators have proven effective in rebuilding communication and trust, yet they remain localised. The government has no targeted programmes to support Roma parents. Integrated, family-centred approaches remain limited.

Vzájemné Soužití runs door-to-door outreach campaigns in excluded neighbourhoods, informing parents about enrolment deadlines and kindergarten access, their child's rights in school placement, support options, complaints procedures, and local services. In many cases, these personal conversations correct misinformation and prevent school exclusion before it begins.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, there are no Roma-specific national policies to support parents in their children's education, and general social benefits are inadequate for families in deep poverty. Allowances are small, unchanged for years, and lose value amid inflation. Free school meals and textbooks are available to disadvantaged pupils, but broader family support remains weak. Some NGOs provide mentoring and parental training, yet coverage is modest. No specific mechanisms exist for children whose parents work abroad, and family instability linked to precarious employment continues to affect school participation.

In **Romania**, housing and employment conditions remain the key obstacles preventing Roma parents from effectively supporting their children's education. Overcrowded homes and irregular working hours of the parents make it difficult for Roma children to have the right environments to study, while many parents work informally or away from home. Central authorities provide little structural assistance, though local NGOs often intervene to create preschool or after-school facilities. A 2023 law introduced targeted support for children with parents working abroad, granting free meals and educational and psychological assistance in after-school programmes. While these are positive measures, its impact is limited.

In **Slovakia**, Roma parents from marginalised communities lack the resources and living conditions necessary to support their children's education. Social benefits are too low to cover basic needs, and housing deprivation, poor health, and isolation compound educational disadvantage. Many parents, having attended segregated or special schools themselves, distrust institutions and cannot provide academic help at home. Public debate often blames parents for children's absenteeism, ignoring structural poverty. There are no targeted national measures for children of parents working abroad, and existing family support schemes remain largely symbolic.

"If the parents themselves attended segregated or special schools where no one paid attention to them, it is logical that they lack trust in the education system."

Social worker, Slovakia

In **Spain**, severe socio-economic hardship limits Roma parents' capacity to support their children's learning, with unemployment, informal work, and inadequate housing remaining widespread. Access to social and housing benefits is hampered by bureaucracy, and families in precarious conditions are sometimes penalised rather than supported when children miss school. Some municipalities provide family accompaniment or social work teams, but these initiatives are patchy. No national programmes specifically address the needs of children with parents working abroad, though schools occasionally coordinate with relatives caring for such children.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Sweden**, Roma mediators facilitate communication between parents and schools, helping to build trust and increase parental engagement.

ANTIGYPSYISM IN EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Ample evidence from all six countries shows that **antigypsyism continues to permeate education systems**, which shapes how Roma pupils and students are treated, perceived, and graded, which in turn limits their educational opportunities throughout the lifecycle.

***Bullying, ridicule, racial slurs, and exclusion,* both in person and online, remain widespread, often going unreported or unaddressed by teachers, and sometimes these behaviours are even *perpetrated and perpetuated by educational staff*.**

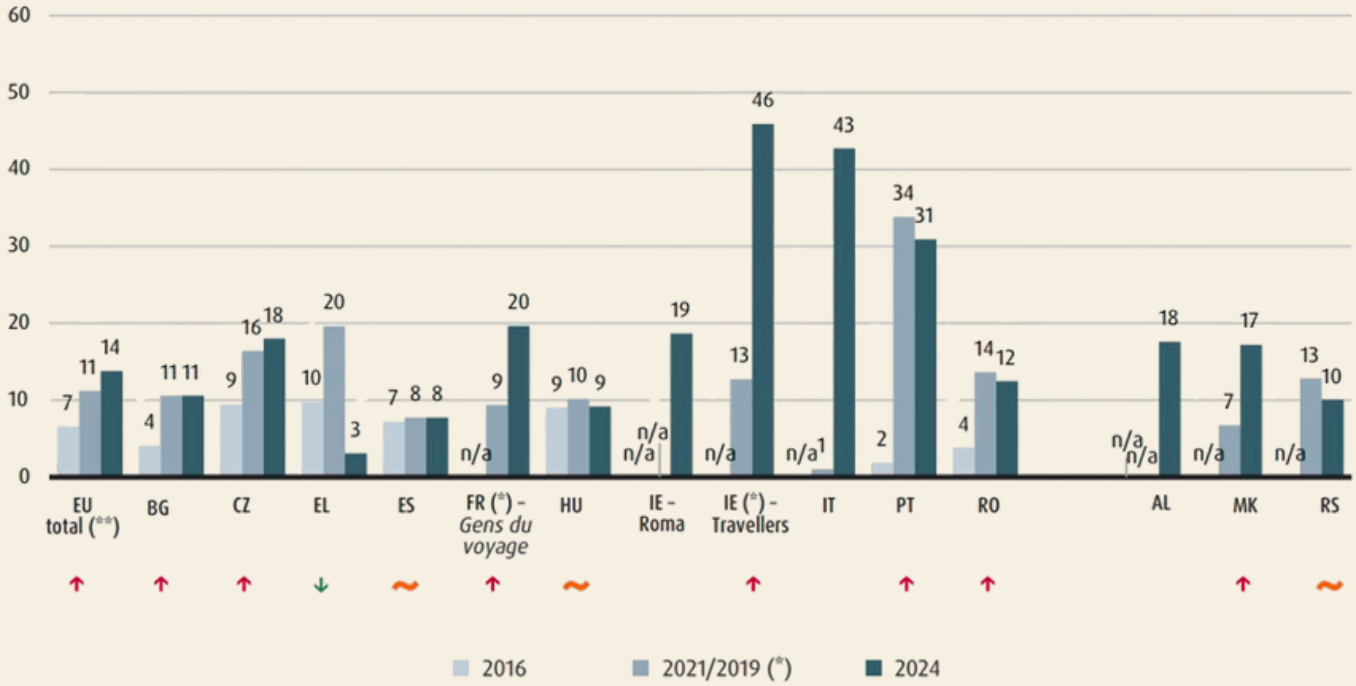
Roma pupils are **frequently stereotyped as undisciplined or "less capable"**, which translates into lower expectations, harsher punishments, and disproportionate placement in segregated or special schools (see next section). **Discrimination against children experiencing poverty and digital exclusion compounds these effects:** if Roma and other vulnerable children lack adequate clothing, school supplies, or internet access, they are sometimes penalised with **poor grades or suspension**, instead of receiving the support they need. The **psychological toll is severe**, leading to shame, low self-esteem, and early school leaving. Governments have made formal commitments to inclusive education, but implementation is weak, and **desegregation, anti-bullying strategies, and anti-racist teacher training remain patchy** or purely declarative. Ending antigypsyism requires systemic accountability, investment in inclusive and mainstream education, and mandatory anti-bias and intercultural training for all education staff.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** urges Member States to "work towards overcoming all discrimination, inequality and disadvantages in terms of educational opportunities, outcomes and attainment", to adopt "measures to combat school bullying and harassment, both online and offline, to protect all pupils, including Roma, as well as measures to raise awareness among teachers and other school staff of [...] methods for recognising and combating discrimination and its root causes, including antigypsyism and unconscious bias, and of the importance of non-discriminatory education and effective equal access to mainstream education."

In its most recent survey on the ***Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries***, released in October 2025, the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** notes:

"14% of Roma/Traveller respondents felt discriminated against because of their ethnic origin during the 12 months before the survey when in contact with an educational institution, either as a student or as a parent/guardian of a child. This is a higher share than in 2016 (7%). All countries surveyed observe the same negative trend except for Hungary, Serbia and Spain, where the situation has not changed, and Greece, where the share of Roma experiencing discrimination in education has decreased."

FIGURE 16: RESPONDENTS WHO FELT DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF BEING ROMA/TRAVELLER WHEN IN CONTACT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (AS A PARENT/GUARDIAN OR A STUDENT) IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2024; Roma Survey 2021; Roma and Travellers Survey 2019; EU-MIDIS II 2016.

In **Bulgaria,** antigypsyism remains widespread in education, creating a hostile environment that undermines Roma children's learning and motivation. Many teachers hold low expectations of Roma pupils, assuming poor performance or indiscipline in advance. As a result, Roma students are often ignored in class or excluded from school activities, reinforcing feelings of inferiority. Physical and verbal bullying is frequent, with slurs such as "gypsy" used openly by classmates and, at times, tolerated by teachers. Few cases are formally reported or sanctioned. Poverty further compounds discrimination, as students unable to afford clothing, supplies, or digital access are sometimes graded poorly or penalised for absenteeism, rather than supported through hardship. There are no comprehensive state measures to combat antigypsyism or segregation, and teacher training on diversity and intercultural skills remains largely absent.

"Very few cases of antigypsyism in schools reach the Commission for Protection against Discrimination or the courts. This is partly because Roma parents often do not believe it is worth complaining, are unaware of their rights, or fear possible repercussions. As a result, antigypsyism in education largely remains invisible and unpunished."

Social worker, Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, antigypsyism remains pervasive in Czech education, visible both in school culture and in daily interactions. Almost a quarter of Roma pupils report bullying linked to their ethnicity, and many face stereotyping from teachers and peers alike. Cases of cyberbullying and isolation are frequent, while schools rarely intervene effectively. Some positive steps, such as anti-bullying initiatives in Ostrava schools and new desegregation pilots, have shown promise, but discrimination remains deeply rooted. Menstrual poverty and digital exclusion continue to reinforce gendered and social disparities. Without systemic teacher training and accountability mechanisms, antigypsyism will remain a key barrier to inclusion.

In **Hungary**, antigypsyism in education remains institutional and deeply embedded, reflected in persistent segregation and unequal learning conditions. Court rulings, such as the Gyöngyöspata case, have confirmed that Roma pupils were unlawfully separated and denied access to equal-quality education. Despite these precedents, segregation continues across many localities, often justified as "pedagogical differentiation." Roma students are also subject to stereotyping, neglect, and, at times, direct bullying by peers or teachers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, when learning moved online, many lacked devices or internet access and were penalised with poor grades instead of being offered alternatives. Government efforts to address antigypsyism are limited and often politically contested, while NGOs and local advocates remain the main actors monitoring abuses.

In **Romania**, antigypsyism in education ranges from overt bullying to structural segregation and subtle everyday exclusion. Roma children are often placed in separate classes or schools, or wrongly channelled into special education. Bullying and mockery are common in classrooms, leading to stress, absenteeism, and early school leaving. Many schools lack psychologists or counsellors able to intervene effectively. Poverty-driven disadvantage is often treated as indiscipline, with pupils graded poorly for missing materials or homework rather than being supported. The government has taken a first step by introducing a system to identify segregation in school data, but effective desegregation depends on local willingness and resources. Broader efforts to train teachers, address bias, and ensure quality education in Roma communities are still missing.

In **Slovakia**, antigypsyism perpetuates segregation and low-quality schooling for Roma, from preschool onward. Roma children are often separated from the beginning from their non-Roma peers, either through catchment zoning or parental pressure. Segregated schools typically offer limited curricula and fewer qualified teachers, reinforcing social exclusion. Many Roma pupils experience open mockery, neglect, and discrimination from peers and educators alike. Material deprivation is frequently misread as a lack of discipline, leading to failing grades or expulsion instead of remedial help. Legal frameworks prohibit segregation, but enforcement is minimal, and proposed reforms, such as Romani-language schools, risk deepening separation if they are not community-driven. Systemic desegregation, mixed-school incentives, and anti-racist teacher training are urgently needed to reverse entrenched inequalities.

A Roma girl in the 9th grade from eastern Slovakia wanted to apply to nursing school, but her teacher told her she would be better off attending vocational training to become a seamstress. The teacher claimed that patients would likely reject her as a nurse, but that working in a factory would protect her from racist abuse. The student was deeply hurt by this attitude from someone she had expected to support her. Nevertheless, she submitted her application to the nursing school, and she was accepted. Today, she is doing practical training in a hospital and has said that she has never encountered racism from patients.

Slovakia

In **Spain**, antigypsyism persists across the education system, with stereotypes portraying Roma students as disruptive or "less capable" leading to subtle exclusion from advanced academic tracks. Bullying and cyberbullying based on Roma identity are frequent, with significant psychological impacts such as anxiety, isolation, and school avoidance. Roma students who cannot afford materials, uniforms, or digital access are often penalised academically instead of receiving support. Institutional responses to bullying are inconsistent, and ethnic discrimination is rarely addressed explicitly in anti-bullying protocols. While regional desegregation pacts and Roma inclusion strategies exist, their enforcement is weak. Strengthening teacher training, integrating Roma culture into curricula, and ensuring accountability for discrimination are essential to build a truly inclusive education system.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, Traveller and Roma communities face persistent and systemic racism within the education system. This racism operates at structural, institutional, and interpersonal levels, shaping how children access, engage, and experience education. Racism manifests in lowered expectations from teachers, discriminatory practices in enrolment and retention, and bullying and prejudice within schools, among others. Inevitably, racism undermines participation and erodes trust in education as a pathway to opportunity.

In **Sweden**, Roma pupils experience discrimination, bullying, and low expectations from teachers and peers. Many hide their Roma identity in school to avoid harassment. There is a lack of systematic monitoring and reporting of ethnicity-based inequalities, since Sweden does not collect disaggregated education data by ethnicity. The Living History Forum has developed new educational materials and teacher training on antigypsyism, and civil society organisations also lead awareness-raising campaigns and family support initiatives; however, these remain short-term and insufficiently mainstreamed.

SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND SCHOOLS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

School segregation and the misplacement of Roma children in special education remain among the *most entrenched forms of educational antigypsyism.*

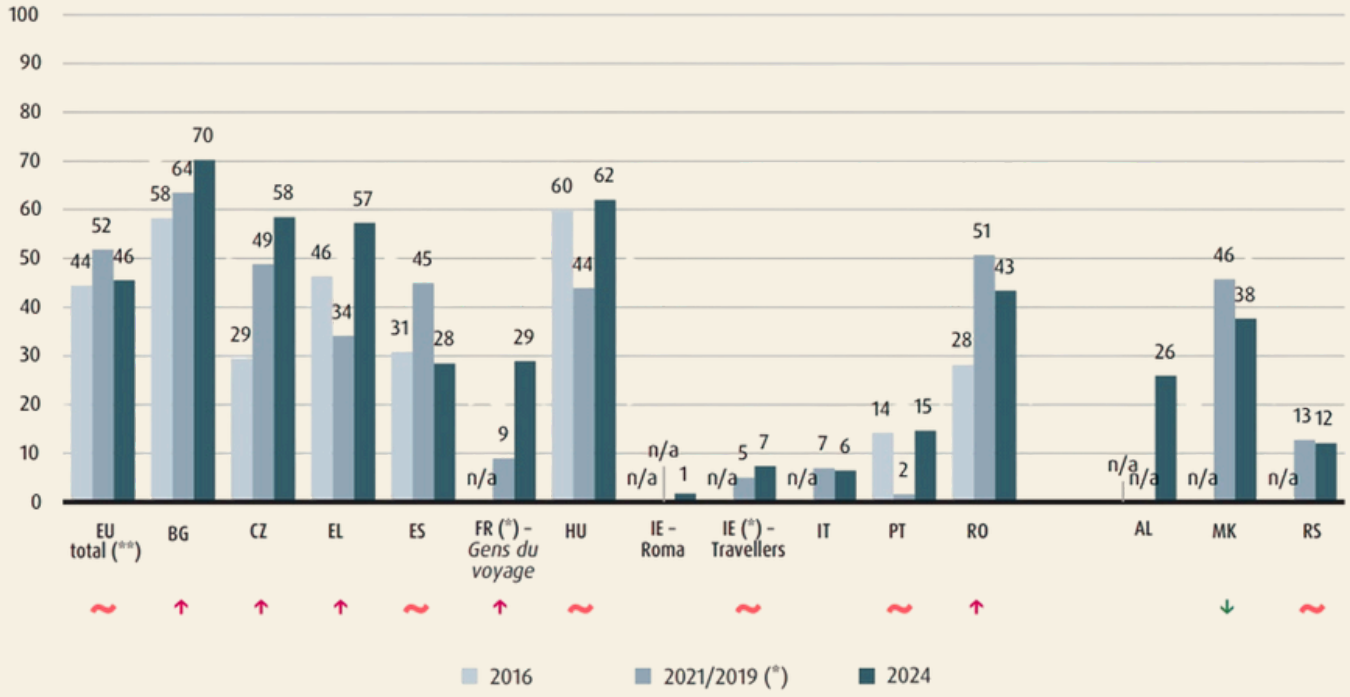
These practices **deprive Roma children of quality education**, reduce their life chances, and entrench cycles of poverty and exclusion. The grounds for misplacement are often social, not medical, as **diagnostic procedures routinely conflate linguistic or socio-economic disadvantage with cognitive disability,** while parents, especially those from poor backgrounds, are persuaded to consent through misleading information or promises of free meals and materials. Many Roma pupils are further **steered into low-prestige vocational pathways** with limited academic prospects, even when they show the potential for higher achievement. **Reparations for segregation are rare**, limited to a handful of court cases, while governments largely avoid acknowledging systemic wrongdoing. Genuine equality requires ending segregation and ensuring that Roma children have the same right to mainstream, high-quality education as any other child.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to put in place measures to overcome "all discrimination, inequality and disadvantages in terms of educational opportunities, outcomes and attainment" to "prevent and eliminate any form of segregation in education and to ensure that the potential of all pupils is supported", to "prevent and eliminate misdiagnosis leading to inappropriate placement of Roma pupils in special needs education and to ensure that the allocation of special needs education is based on a transparent and lawful procedure", as well as to "provide effective methods for recognition and reparation of past injustices in the field of education, including segregation, the inappropriate placement of Roma pupils in special schools and unequal treatment."

In its most recent survey on the ***Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries***, released in October 2025, the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** notes:

"Every second Roma/Traveller child (46%) is educated in a school where all or most of the pupils are Roma/Travellers. This has changed very little over the past few years (52% in 2021 and 44% in 2016). Only in North Macedonia is the trend positive, while most countries surveyed, including Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Greece and Romania, have shown a negative trend (i.e. an increase in segregation) since 2016."

FIGURE 15: CHILDREN AGED 6–15 WHO ATTEND SCHOOLS WHERE ALL OR MOST PUPILS ARE ROMA, ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2024; Roma Survey 2021; Roma and Travellers Survey 2019; EU-MIDIS II 2016.

In **Bulgaria**, almost half of all schools have a high concentration of pupils from vulnerable groups, with many Roma children attending institutions where they are the vast majority or even the only ethnic group. Segregation takes both primary forms (Roma-only schools) and secondary ones, as non-Roma parents withdraw their children from mixed schools. Roma children are still enrolled in special education schools on dubious medical grounds, often because families are persuaded by offers of free meals or "easier curricula." Poverty and lack of alternatives further reinforce such decisions. Many Roma students are also steered into low-status vocational tracks without informed consent, limiting their future opportunities. Although segregation is illegal, no effective national desegregation mechanism or reparation scheme exists.

In the **Czech Republic**, in some districts (e.g. Ústí nad Labem, Ostrava, Přerov), over 50% of Roma children attend schools with mostly Roma pupils. Nationally, the share of Roma children in such schools is estimated at 30–35%, compared to >5% for non-Roma children. Over 130 schools have more than 30% Roma pupils, and 15 exceed 90%. Roma children are overrepresented in "practical" schools, based on biased psychological assessments that misinterpret cultural and language differences as disability. Experts point to a strong "special pedagogy" lobby that sustains segregation under the guise of inclusion. Some cities, such as Brno and Ostrava, have made pilot efforts to redraw catchments, but segregation remains widespread and normalised, with no government reparations for past or ongoing misplacement.

A town in Moravia-Silesia offers a rare and inspiring example of municipality-led desegregation. Under the leadership of a committed mayor and education team:

- *school catchment areas were redefined to balance the ethnic composition of schools,*
- *a clear desegregation strategy was adopted, based on mapping and evidence,*
- *support structures (teaching assistants, social pedagogy staff, and parental liaison officers) were introduced to ease the transition for all families, and*
- *schools received targeted funding and training to support inclusive pedagogy.*

The process was gradual and consultative, involving teachers, Roma parents, and non-Roma families. Krnov proves that with vision, courage, and coordination, segregation is not inevitable.

Krnov, Czech Republic

In **Hungary,** segregation is systemic and deepening, driven by residential concentration, as parents of better means move their children to select church-run schools. Of those left behind to attend public schools, nearly half of Roma pupils attend schools where most classmates are Roma, and hundreds of so-called "ghetto schools" operate nationwide. Biased psychological assessments and socio-economic prejudice continue to push Roma children into special education unjustly. They are also routinely guided into vocational schools with limited academic content, perpetuating structural exclusion. Although a 2023 law formally seeks to curb segregation, it lacks real enforcement or support mechanisms and has been criticised as largely symbolic.

Between 2004 and 2017, Roma pupils at the Nekcsei Demeter Primary School in Gyöngyöspata were taught separately on the ground floor, while non-Roma pupils were placed on the upper floor. Roma children were excluded from swimming lessons, after-school programs, and often were not allowed to use the upstairs restrooms. In 2011, an Ombudsman report found this to be unlawful segregation, and later several court rulings confirmed that ethnic-based separation had occurred in the school, accompanied by a lower quality of education.

In 2018–2019, the court awarded compensation totalling HUF 99 million to 60 Roma students. In May 2020, the Supreme Court (Kúria) upheld the decision. However, by the deadline, the local municipality had not transferred the compensation, offering instead "in-kind" compensation in the form of educational support, which the families refused. The case sparked political debate, with the government labelling the financial compensation as "unjust," and the Prime Minister and other officials referring to the involvement of civil organizations in the lawsuit as being influenced by the "Soros network."

In **Romania**, over half of Roma children attend segregated schools, up from 28% in 2016. Many institutions operate Roma-only classes or shifts, and unqualified teachers are disproportionately assigned to them. The placement of Roma children in special schools still occurs, often under the guise of parental consent and without genuine medical justification. In some cases, even schools that have received EU funds in order to improve the quality and inclusiveness of education are perpetuating segregation, despite formal inclusion goals. Roma pupils are commonly steered toward vocational education rather than general secondary schools, reinforcing unequal outcomes. Authorities have introduced a national system to monitor segregation, but enforcement is limited, and no reparations or sanctions have followed for documented cases. Segregation remains both tolerated and structurally reproduced.

In **Spain**, school segregation persists, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas with large Roma or migrant populations. De facto segregation through residential zoning remains common, as Roma pupils are often concentrated in under-resourced public schools with high staff turnover and limited extracurricular offerings. Many young Roma are also encouraged toward narrow vocational pathways, restricting upward social mobility. Anti-segregation efforts, such as Catalonia's Pact Against School Segregation (2019), have improved awareness but suffer from inconsistent implementation and limited national coordination. There are no formal reparations or compensation mechanisms for segregation or misplacement.

In **Slovakia**, over two-thirds of Roma pupils attend schools where the majority of children are also Roma, and the quality of facilities is low. Meanwhile, diagnostic bias continues to place many in special classes for mild mental disability, as cultural and linguistic differences are still misread as cognitive deficits, perpetuating overrepresentation in special schools. Graduates of these schools face severely limited career options, restricted mainly to basic manual work. Despite reforms since 2016, progress remains slow, and enforcement is weak. The government has taken steps to revise testing protocols and promote inclusive education, but these have yet to yield tangible results. There are no reparations for past misplacements, and segregated schooling remains widespread, especially in rural regions.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, segregation if not a feature in the education system. Inclusion is the driving policy of all education providers. If Traveller and Roma students are overrepresented in any one school, it is a reflection of social factors (i.e. accommodation influences).

ROMANI LANGUAGE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULA

Evidence from the six countries shows that **the teaching of Romani language, history, and culture remains fragmented, optional, or absent** from mainstream education, reflecting a persistent gap between policy ambition and practice.

In most countries (aside from Romania), general education in the Romani language is unavailable or limited **to extracurricular or pilot programmes, often run by NGOs or dedicated minority schools.**

The scarcity of qualified teachers and the **low presence of Roma professionals within the education system** further limit visibility and representation. Where Roma-related content is included in curricula, it tends to appear s**uperficially, reduced to folklore, music, or crafts,** rather than being integrated into national history and citizenship education. **Major historical injustices,** such as the Roma Holocaust, slavery in Eastern Europe, and forced sterilisation, **remain marginal or entirely absent** from textbooks. As a result, most Roma children complete their education without ever encountering a Roma teacher or learning about their own culture in class, while **non-Roma pupils rarely receive balanced information about Roma history** or contributions to society. In some cases, newly developed materials or optional modules represent progress, but their reach is limited and their use depends on local interest and initiative.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to enact measures to "raise awareness among teachers and other school staff of Roma history, Roma cultures and methods for recognising and combating discrimination and its root causes, including antigypsyism and unconscious bias, and of the importance of non-discriminatory education and effective equal access to mainstream education", as well as to "promote equity, inclusiveness and diversity in the education system and the classroom, for example, through professional development programmes, mentoring and peer learning activities."

In **Bulgaria,** the Romani language is not taught as part of the compulsory curriculum, and opportunities to study the language are limited to a few extracurricular activities, mostly within NGO-led projects. Roma representation in the teaching profession remains extremely low, less than 1%, even in regions where Roma pupils constitute over 15% of the student population. Diversity is addressed superficially, and Roma culture is typically presented through folkloric elements rather than as an integral part of Bulgarian history or citizenship education. Since 2020, the curriculum has included optional content on the Roma Holocaust and the history of Roma slavery, but coverage is uneven and often stereotyped.

In the **Czech Republic**, the Roma language, history, and culture are largely absent. Romani is taught in only a few schools, and subjects such as the Roma Holocaust or forced sterilisation are rarely mentioned. Teachers receive no guidance or materials to cover these topics, and Roma are severely underrepresented among teaching staff, less than 0.3% nationally. The absence of Roma role models in schools contributes to low trust and motivation. Organisations such as the Museum of Romani Culture and Post Bellum attempt to fill this gap through projects and exhibitions. Still, without integration into mainstream curricula, Roma children grow up unseen, and non-Roma peers remain unaware of shared history and culture.

In **Hungary,** the teaching of the Romani language and culture is limited and inconsistent, provided mainly through minority education or civil society initiatives. A small number of schools offer instruction in Lovari or Beás languages, but participation is low. The national curriculum includes no mandatory Roma-related content, and existing materials often reduce Roma culture to folklore or stereotypes. Roma remain almost absent from the teaching workforce, and teacher training on intercultural competence, anti-bias, or antigypsyism is scarce. Historical injustices, including the Holocaust, are barely addressed in school materials, while topics on diversity are treated generically. There is no overarching national strategy to ensure Roma representation or to systematically include Roma language, history, and culture in schools.

In **Romania**, the Romani language and culture can be studied within the public education system, provided that at least ten parents request it. Teaching materials and trained teachers exist, and a national Romani language contest (Olimpiada) is held annually. However, such classes remain optional and unevenly distributed. A module on Roma history and traditions can also be introduced upon parental request, and a new course titled "The history, slavery and deportation of Roma" is currently under approval by the Ministry of Education. Still, these remain optional and reach mostly Roma pupils rather than the general population. Representation of Roma teachers is minimal, and teacher training on antigypsyism or diversity is limited. The Roma Holocaust appears in 8th-grade textbooks, but often in distorted or even racist terms.

In **Slovakia**, formal Romani language education exists mainly at the university level, notably at the University of Prešov and the now-defunct Institute of Romani Studies at the University of Nitra, whose closure in 2025 represented a major setback. There is no systematic Romani teaching in primary or secondary schools. There are very few Roma teachers, few educational institutions have Roma staff beyond assistant roles. Recent analysis by the National Institute for Education found that Roma appear the least frequently of all national minorities in textbooks, often reduced to a single mention in the 9th grade. The Roma Holocaust and historical injustices are touched upon only sporadically. Despite strong community advocacy, there are no nationwide efforts to promote Roma history or culture across the curriculum.

In 1990, the Department of Roma Culture was established at the Constantine the Philosopher University, later transformed into the Institute of Romani Studies. The uniqueness of this institution lay in the fact that it was led by Roma and many Roma also taught there. The institute conducted research on Romani culture and history, and on the formation of Roma identity in modern Slovak history. It also offered higher education in the fields of social work and social counselling. In June 2025, the institute was closed by order of the Dean of the Faculty of Social Affairs at Constantine the Philosopher University. The Roma lost an important institution for higher education and research.

Nitra, Slovakia

In **Spain**, there is no formal instruction in the Romani language, as Caló (the historical variant spoken by Spanish Roma) has largely ceased to be transmitted. Nonetheless, some regional education authorities have begun incorporating materials on Roma history and culture, albeit inconsistently. Roma remain largely absent from teaching and educational support professions, and few schools have Roma mediators or intercultural staff. Depictions in textbooks tend to be tokenistic or outdated, focusing on music or folklore. Major historical injustices such as the Holocaust are almost entirely absent from curricula. Local initiatives, including teacher training sessions and awareness campaigns by Roma organisations, show promise but lack sustained institutional backing.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Sweden**, Although Roma children have a legal right to mother tongue education, only about 25% of those entitled participate. Numbers are declining due to a lack of qualified teachers, local economic priorities, a lack of information to parents, and fear of stigmatisation if being open with your Roma identity. The Roma Holocaust, slavery, and antigypsyism are poorly covered in the school curricula. Most teachers lack training on Roma history and minority rights. Roma are almost absent among teaching staff at all levels of education.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Access to **education does not improve for Roma learners as they enter adulthood**, as shown by evidence from the six countries.

Roma adults face *persistent barriers to lifelong learning*, despite formal policy commitments to inclusive, lifelong learning education and to professional upskilling. While most countries have adopted national strategies promoting lifelong learning or adult education, *participation rates among Roma remain extremely low*.

Poverty, work instability, lack of childcare, and low literacy levels limit access, while **adult learning opportunities are seldom located in or near Roma communities**. Many programmes depend on short-term EU funding and fail to address the realities of daily survival, where considerations about **time, transport, childcare, and cost are major obstacles**. "Second-chance" schools or evening programmes do exist, but they are often rigid, slow-paced, and poorly adapted to adult learners who left school early. At the same time, **non-formal education** - such as literacy courses, cultural or digital workshops, or training in crafts - **plays a vital role in building confidence and reconnecting adults with learning**, though these initiatives rarely lead to recognised qualifications. Roma adults, particularly women, who are eager to improve their education often find themselves discouraged by **bureaucratic hurdles or social stigma**.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to "ensure that all Roma have effective equal access to and are able to participate in all forms and stages of education, from early childhood education and childcare to tertiary education, including second chance education, adult education, and lifelong learning", to put in place "measures to provide individualised support and mediation to [...] encourage second chance and adult education" as well as "measures to support participation in non-formal learning and extracurricular activities, including youth, sport and cultural activities within the framework of health and civic education, and other activities that enhance self-development, psychological resilience and well-being".

In **Bulgaria**, lifelong learning is recognised as a strategic priority, but Roma participation remains low. The Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning 2021–2030 envisions "second-chance" schools, adult literacy courses, and skill validation through vocational training, yet implementation is weak. Roma adults can, in principle, enrol in evening schools or independent study programmes, but motivation and participation are limited, hindered by time constraints, stigma, and irrelevant course content. Many training initiatives are superficial, offering little real benefit or connection to the labour market. Roma adults seeking to continue education often lack digital access or local opportunities, while non-professional learning—such as crafts or hobby courses—is scarce outside major cities. Greater flexibility through weekend classes, distance learning, and community-based programmes could revitalise adult participation.

In the **Czech Republic**, lifelong learning opportunities for Roma adults remain scarce and fragmented. Only about 2% of Roma adults participate in training, compared to 6% nationally. Many lack basic education, digital skills, or access to online learning. Public lifelong learning programmes rarely adapt to Roma adults' needs, while requalification courses often fail to connect with the labour market. High costs, transport difficulties, stigma, and low confidence discourage participation. Access to informal or hobby-related courses, such as crafts or language classes, is even more restricted. While the national strategy on lifelong learning highlights inclusivity, Roma participation depends largely on local engagement and NGO support rather than state provision. NGO projects such as ROMA REKWORK provide literacy and vocational training, but they reach only a small share of the population.

In **Hungary,** adult learning and second-chance education opportunities for Roma are fragmented and often ineffective. While formal participation in adult education among the general population has increased, Roma adults remain largely excluded due to low basic skills, poverty, and weak programme design. Many EU-funded courses suffer from poor planning or misalignment with local labour markets, training Roma in skills for which no real jobs exist. Access to general education for adults is unpredictable and dependent on temporary development programmes. Non-formal learning (arts, crafts, digital literacy) exists mainly through NGOs, which also provide mentoring and support, but state-backed lifelong learning for disadvantaged adults is minimal. Without coordinated planning, transparency, and accountability, adult education risks becoming a symbolic exercise rather than a genuine inclusion tool.

Based on its long-standing experience on the ground, Autonómia Foundation highlights serious shortcomings in adult education and vocational training for Roma. Many adults lack the basic literacy and learning skills needed to participate effectively in training, while the courses offered are frequently misaligned with the local labour market. In one observed case, in a town of 6 000 residents (2 000 of them Roma), around 50 people were trained as childcare assistants, despite the absence of any jobs in that field, under a programme designed by a consulting company with no local expertise or prior needs assessment.

Hungary

In **Romania**, participation in lifelong learning has grown nationally, reaching over 19% in 2022, but Roma adults, especially those in rural areas, remain largely excluded. Second-chance schools and adult education centres exist, but are too few and too distant from Roma communities, making attendance difficult for parents or those in daily employment. Transport and childcare barriers, coupled with rigid schedules, reduce feasibility. Most adults with limited schooling lack digital skills, restricting access to online or blended learning. Non-professional education opportunities, such as hobby courses or crafts, are almost entirely run by NGOs. Despite rising awareness of adult education's importance, structural obstacles such as distance, cost, and stigma continue to keep Roma adults out of lifelong learning.

In **Slovakia**, adult education is framed under the Strategy for Lifelong Learning and Guidance 2021–2030, but participation remains low, particularly among marginalised Roma. Formal second-chance education has legal and institutional support, yet suffers from poor implementation, limited flexibility, and low motivation among potential participants. Few programmes offer mentoring or financial assistance, and many courses do not lead to recognised qualifications. Geographic inequality is severe: most adult education takes place in companies or urban centres, while Roma communities in rural areas are left out. Non-formal educational opportunities, such as cultural, digital, or craft-based courses, exist mainly through NGOs.

In **Spain**, lifelong learning and second-chance education are widely available in theory but remain hard to access for Roma adults, especially women. Second-chance schools operate across most regions, yet distance, work schedules, and childcare responsibilities lead to high dropout rates. Many Roma adults express strong motivation to return to education, but face barriers such as digital illiteracy, economic insecurity and bureaucratic complications when prior schooling is unrecognised. Non-formal learning, such as foreign languages, crafts, or cultural workshops, is mainly offered by NGOs and community centres and reaches only small groups. Flexible, community-based adult education, designed around Roma adults' realities and schedules, is urgently needed to make lifelong learning meaningful and accessible.

"I never got to finish school. Now I'm trying, little by little, because I want to help my children with their homework. But it's hard when the classes are far away and I work cleaning in the mornings."

Roma woman, 42, Valencia, Spain

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, Travellers in higher education highlight barriers such as financial insecurity, limited access to IT, and concerns about employment prospects after graduation. The Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 is a positive development.

SKILLS FOR THE LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL MOBILITY, INCLUDING DIGITAL SKILLS

Across the six countries, the *Roma continue to face major barriers in acquiring professional and digital skills*, both as jobseekers and employees.

Access to vocational training remains patchy, often tied to short-term development projects rather than to sustained labour-market needs. Many Roma **work in low-skilled or informal sectors with no access to upskilling** opportunities, while existing training programmes frequently fail to match local job demand. **Digital exclusion further limits Roma employability and participation**: many households lack internet access, digital devices, and basic digital literacy, making it difficult to apply for jobs, complete administrative procedures, access services, or benefit from online learning. The education systems of most countries remain **poorly equipped to promote social mobility**, working rather to reproduce existing inequality. Sustained public investment is needed in **inclusive vocational and digital skills programmes** accessible to Roma communities, coupled with income support measures and tailored career guidance.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021)** urges Member States to adopt measures to "support efforts to ensure that Roma pupils acquire skills in line with current and future labour market needs", "increase Roma social mobility, for example through positive action, dedicated scholarships in vocational, secondary and higher education and in teacher training, and career guidance", and to "promote, where relevant, the acquisition of digital skills, broadband access, adequate digital infrastructure and the provision of teaching material equipped for distance learning both in formal and non-formal educational settings, so as to prevent the digital exclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils, their teachers and parents, and ensure outreach to Roma pupils, including those living in rural or segregated areas."

In **Bulgaria**, Roma access to vocational training and professional development remains highly restricted. Most Roma are employed in low-skilled, unstable jobs where employers offer no training opportunities. Vocational courses provided through employment offices are often misaligned with labour-market needs and have educational prerequisites that exclude those with limited schooling. Digital exclusion is severe: fewer than one in five Roma adults have basic digital skills, compared to 35% nationally. Many struggle to use online job portals or e-services. While the government broadly promotes digitalisation, Roma are not recognised as a priority group, and education curricula still neglect digital competences.

In the **Czech Republic**, Roma learners face major obstacles in acquiring professional and digital skills, both in school and as job seekers. Many families lack computers or internet access, excluding children from online education and hampering adults' ability to study, apply for jobs, or access e-government services. Vocational schools typically offer low-level training with limited career progression, while teacher bias and social barriers discourage Roma students from pursuing higher education. Programmes by NGOs provide digital and professional training, but coverage is limited. Sustainable investment in digital infrastructure, mentoring, and practical skills development is needed to ensure real social mobility.

In **Hungary**, according to OECD and PISA, the education system is among the least inclusive in Europe, often reproducing rather than reducing inequality. Schools serving disadvantaged areas provide lower-quality education, while vocational programmes are rarely linked to real labour-market needs. Roma workers are mainly employed in unskilled jobs and have limited access to workplace training or advancement. Digital literacy is also very low: many Roma households lack devices, connectivity, and digital confidence. Although various EU- and Swiss-funded projects aimed to improve digital competencies in schools, implementation gaps and a lack of teacher training have reduced their impact. Civil society initiatives, such as robotics classes for Roma children, have achieved promising results, but systemic integration of digital and professional skills training remains weak.

In **Romania**, Roma adults face limited access to training and professional development, with many excluded from state-supported upskilling schemes due to low education or informal employment. Vocational programmes funded by the EU often fail to match local labour-market needs, producing qualifications with little practical use. Digital exclusion is widespread, with about 72% of Romanian adults lacking basic digital skills, and Roma likely faring even worse. NGOs have attempted to preserve and adapt traditional Roma crafts, but these efforts remain small-scale. The public education system rarely equips Roma youth with marketable skills or adequate guidance, leading to low social mobility. Expanding relevant vocational pathways and integrating digital competence into education are key to improving Roma inclusion in the labour market.

In **Slovakia**, Roma jobseekers can access state-funded training under the Employment Services Act, but such courses rarely translate into real employment. The focus remains on short-term qualifications, rather than sustainable skill-building or career pathways. No national data exist on Roma digital literacy, though the low general digital proficiency in Slovakia (52%) suggests a similarly poor Roma score. Marginalised Roma communities lack access to stable internet, devices, and opportunities for digital learning. Social mobility is severely constrained by segregated education, low confidence, and limited exposure to mainstream networks. While state-funded training is formally inclusive, outcomes remain poor. Coordinated investment in digital access, mentoring, and locally relevant vocational education would help Roma adults connect more effectively with the labour market.

In **Spain**, the Roma continue to face structural barriers in acquiring professional and digital skills, despite a robust framework for lifelong learning and employment training. Many Roma adults combine informal work with caregiving, leaving little time for standard courses. Training opportunities often fail to reach Roma communities, and digital illiteracy remains widespread, particularly among women and older adults. Education systems still do not ensure upward mobility, as Roma students are overrepresented in short vocational tracks and underrepresented in higher education. Expanding outreach, providing free digital training, and creating inclusive guidance services would support greater labour market participation and equality.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, participation in apprenticeships with direct links to employment remains underdeveloped. Targeted initiatives, such as the Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme, and bursaries for employers launched in 2023, mark important steps forward. However, these programmes must be paired with anti-racism training for providers and employers to tackle entrenched discrimination, because even when educational attainment improves, employment exclusion persists, which undermines the perceived value of education.

EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL ROMA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

In 2021, the European Union adopted a **Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation**, where one of the four sectoral objectives explicitly states "**Increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education**", with three sub-targets: **to cut the gap in participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) by at least half**, ensuring that at least 70% of Roma children participate in pre-school; **cut the gap in upper secondary completion by at least half**, ensuring that at least 90% of Roma complete it; and to **cut at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools**, ensuring that, by 2030, less than one in five Roma child attend schools where most or all children are Roma. Through the **2019 Declaration on Roma Integration in the EU Enlargement Process**, Western Balkan countries equally committed to the implementation of the Strategy, including to improving Roma education outcomes. Governments were hence invited to address this policy area in their **National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs)**. Additionally, the **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to improve **Roma access to quality and inclusive mainstream education** through a wide range of detailed provisions, which have been separately reviewed in the previous sections of this report.

On 29 September 2024, the European Commission released an **evaluation report of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks**, assessing their implementation and their suitability for achieving progress towards the 2030 targets. In its previous 2023 assessment, the European Commission had invited Member States to step up their level of ambition concerning educational support measures for Roma, particularly in what concerned segregation, early school leaving, and social mobility. The 2024 report notes that "**Educational segregation continues to be a major challenge for several Member States, showing a worsening of the situation, with minimal to no progress.**" The Commission further calls on Member States to, once again, "increase access and participation of Roma children in quality inclusive and desegregated education; and reduce early school leaving and underachievement in basic skills, in line with the Council recommendation on Pathways to School Success". (our bold)

"On the basis of the EU Racial Equality Directive, the Commission opened three infringement cases – against CZ (2014), SK (2015), HU (2016) – for discrimination against Roma children in education. In 2023, the Commission referred Slovakia to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failing to effectively tackle this issue. The Commission is closely monitoring the situation of Roma children in educational systems in the concerned Member States."

European Commission

The National Roma Strategic Frameworks are also being **evaluated by civil society**, as part of the **Roma Civil Monitoring 2021-2025 project**, funded by the European Commission and implemented by a consortium comprised of the Democracy Institute of the Central European University (CEU), Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), and ERGO Network. The **assessment reports for all countries**, including all the EU Member States covered by this report, were published in November 2022 and are available on the **project website**. **Each report also features a section on education**. The **synthesis of the assessment reports** identifies the following missing dimensions from National Roma Strategic Frameworks, concerning education: early school leaving (from both primary and secondary school); secondary education and vocational training disconnected from labour market needs; misplacement into special education tracks and increased concentration in low-quality schools; limited access to and support for online and distance learning; low-level digital competences among pupils.

The findings of the European Commission are echoed by the national contributions reviewed in this report. While Roma access to quality and inclusive **education continues to feature prominently in all six National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs)**, yet the **quality, scope, and implementation of measures remain uneven and largely project-dependent**. While the main goals align with the EU Roma Strategic Framework, focusing on early childhood education, school participation, desegregation, and access to higher education, **many objectives remain vague**, with **limited quantitative targets, weak monitoring systems**, and unclear accountability. Several frameworks rely almost entirely on EU funding, with insufficient state budget allocations to ensure continuity. Across countries, **the absence of clear indicators, stable financing, and active Roma participation** undermines progress and ownership.

Positive developments include **explicit recognition of desegregation** (notably in Bulgaria and Slovakia), commitments to expand early childhood education, and the growing visibility of measures to prevent early school leaving. However, the frameworks often **fall short in addressing systemic antigypsyism, ensuring teacher diversity, or linking education with broader social determinants** such as housing, health, and family income. In most cases, Roma civil society organisations play a crucial role in both policy design and grassroots implementation, yet **formal partnership mechanisms remain weak or tokenistic**. A stronger, rights-based approach, backed by national resources and consistent monitoring, is needed to translate the NRSF education objectives into tangible outcomes for Roma learners.

In **Bulgaria**, the NRSF identifies education as a top priority, structured around early childhood development, access to quality education, desegregation, and higher education. For the first time, the Strategy explicitly acknowledges the need to overcome school segregation and promote multicultural environments. Commitments to expand the network of educational mediators, support parental engagement, and improve transitions between education levels are positive steps. However, most measures rely on temporary EU projects, with limited national funding or local accountability. Monitoring mechanisms remain weak, and indicators are often broad or undefined. Roma organisations were only partially involved in implementation design, limiting community ownership. To ensure real progress, the Strategy needs clear, measurable education indicators, guaranteed state funding, inclusive monitoring structures involving Roma NGOs, as well as needs-based approaches, rooted in local realities.

In **Hungary,** the NRSF includes several education-related commitments, and the accompanying Action Plan (2021–2024) outlines measures on early childhood education, school meals, textbooks, and after-school support through "tanoda" programmes and Sure Start Children's Homes. While these initiatives help reduce immediate barriers, they lack systemic continuity and measurable goals. Desegregation is mentioned only superficially, and state-supported segregation persists, particularly in church-run schools. Antigypsyism is not explicitly addressed, and there are no mechanisms for accountability or reparations. Although the strategy recognises the need to support Roma girls and women, intersectional awareness is limited. Overall, the framework identifies the right challenges, but it fails to link interventions across educational stages, and to tackle structural inequality and racism.

In the **Czech Republic**, the NRSF sets clear targets – halving the preschool participation gap, reducing segregation, and cutting the NEET rate – but implementation is weak and inconsistent. Desegregation measures, mediator programmes, and inclusive teaching reforms depend largely on EU projects rather than national funding. Progress on integrating the Romani language, history, and culture has been minimal. While desegregation is formally a goal, progress has been limited, and Roma children continue to be overrepresented in special or "practical" schools. While the Strategy provides a useful framework, its impact is undermined by limited political will, fragmented coordination, and poor enforcement mechanisms.

In **Romania**, the NRSF contains a substantial education component, with 21 proposed measures addressing access, quality, and participation, including building schools, improving teacher training, and monitoring segregation. While the strategy provides a strong analytical overview, implementation remains uncertain: most measures depend on institutions beyond the National Agency for Roma, and coordination mechanisms are weak. Although progress was made in detecting and documenting segregation, concrete action to reduce it is lacking. The NRSF tends to list problems broadly rather than define targeted priorities or measurable results. A stronger focus is needed on teacher retention in disadvantaged schools, desegregation enforcement, and accountability for results.

In **Slovakia**, education remains central to Roma inclusion efforts in the NRSF. Recent policy developments, such as the legal entitlement to kindergarten places for children aged 3 and 4, and the introduction of a desegregation monitoring mechanism (2024), represent progress. A new national project to develop an early warning system for early school leaving is also underway. However, systemic fragmentation persists: early childhood education spans multiple ministries, and there is no unified data system on Roma children's participation in these measures. Moreover, expansion of facilities risks reinforcing residential segregation if new schools are built within excluded localities. Despite some promising reforms, implementation remains uneven, and new laws easing the creation of minority schools could deepen segregation. Sustainable desegregation and integrated monitoring are critical for meaningful impact.

Benchmarking with other Member States

In **Ireland**, the Department of Education's Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024-2030 is part of the wider National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS).

In **Sweden**, the national strategy for Roma inclusion (2012–2032) features the ambition that a Roma child born in 2012 will have the same opportunities as a non-Roma child by 2032. However, the strategy has not been updated in line with the EU Roma Strategic Framework (2020–2030), and education measures remain vague, with insufficient focus on combating antigypsyism in schools.

In **Spain**, the NRSF places strong emphasis on education, particularly early childhood access, mediation, and desegregation. However, its effectiveness is limited by weak enforcement, inconsistent regional implementation, and a lack of guaranteed funding. The measures largely depend on voluntary cooperation among autonomous regions, resulting in fragmented progress. Roma civil society plays an essential role in bridging these gaps, running after-school programmes and mentoring initiatives, but without long-term institutional backing. The strategy also fails to sufficiently address lifelong learning, adult education, and systemic antigypsyism. A stronger legal framework, anchored in binding targets, sustainable funding, and Roma participation in decision-making, is needed to translate strategic goals into measurable educational progress.

CONCLUSIONS

In all six countries reviewed by this report, **education remains the clearest measure and the most powerful driver of Roma inclusion**. However, the findings of this report confirm that **systemic inequality continues to define Roma learners' experiences across** the educational system, throughout the lifecycle.

From early childhood education and care to adult learning, the Roma face intertwined *barriers of poverty, segregation, discrimination, and institutional neglect.*

Despite formal commitments under the EU Roma Strategic Framework and national strategies, most **measures remain fragmented, underfunded, and dependent on short-term projects**, with limited coordination between education and other policy areas such as housing, health, or employment.

Encouraging progress can be seen in certain areas, such as the expansion of early childhood education, stronger parental engagement through mediators, emerging desegregation initiatives, and local mentorship schemes. However, these remain **exceptions rather than the rule**, and a number of other **educational areas remain unaddressed**. Many governments still lack comprehensive data, clear accountability mechanisms, and effective inclusion frameworks that link national policy with community realities. Above all, the **persistence of school segregation, antigypsyism, and low expectations continues to undermine equality of opportunity** in education.

To break this cycle, the next phase of Roma inclusion policies must **move from project-based interventions to sustainable, rights-based reform**, backed by appropriate public funding, featuring policy coherence with other areas, and grounded in evidence and Roma participation at every level. Inclusive education must be treated not as a labour-market prerequisite, but as a **cornerstone of democratic and social cohesion**. Ensuring equal access to quality education for Roma children is an **investment in Europe's shared future.**

In **Bulgaria**, the Roma community continues to face persistent inequality in access to quality education, from early childhood through higher levels. Structural barriers of a financial, institutional, and discriminatory nature maintain high dropout rates and widespread segregation. Despite a strong legal framework and the presence of mediators, implementation is weak, and long-term public funding is lacking. Education policy still expects Roma children to adapt to the system, rather than render the system fit for diversity and for all learners in society.

In the **Czech Republic**, Roma education remains marked by segregation, poverty, and institutional prejudice. Teacher bias, underfunded mediators, and the absence of culturally inclusive curricula continue to hinder progress. Both government and EU-funded programmes remain short-term and insufficiently coordinated, failing to address the structural roots of exclusion. Sustainable investment, desegregation, and consistent recognition of Roma identity in education are indispensable for achieving genuine equality and social mobility.

In **Hungary,** eliminating educational segregation is the key priority, including in predominantly Roma areas, through measures such as school transport and desegregation support. Real progress requires adequate funding, stronger school autonomy, and better links between education and social services. A comprehensive reform plan, with a dedicated Government body and effective mentoring, monitoring, and quality assurance are essential to achieve change.

In **Romania**, despite significant investments in education infrastructure and social support, the gap between Roma and non-Roma achievement remains wide. Forthcoming cuts to education spending, particularly in scholarships and infrastructure, will seriously impact Roma learners. While some progress is visible in data monitoring and legislative development, implementation lags behind. Discrimination and negative perceptions persist, and vocational education often reinforces segregation.

In **Slovakia**, Roma children continue to face systemic barriers to equal education, driven by deep poverty, social exclusion, and persistent antigypsyism. Despite legal commitments to desegregation and recent reforms introducing mandatory pre-primary education and segregation monitoring, implementation is inconsistent and inclusive measures are often designed in ways that inadvertently reinforce separation. Real progress will depend on coordinated, long-term investment in supporting families and tackling desegregation and discrimination.

In **Spain**, structural and multidimensional obstacles continue to hinder Roma access to quality education, despite free public schooling. Poverty, school segregation, housing instability, and antigypsyism persist as key barriers. Early school leaving remains high, especially among girls and migrant Roma. Roma organisations play a central role in providing after-school and adult learning support, but public commitment and funding remain inconsistent. Sustainable, inclusive education policies must build on these grassroots efforts.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

BULGARIA

- **Expand access to quality kindergartens and nursery services in Roma neighbourhoods,** including through mobile teams and Roma staff.
- **Eliminate hidden costs in education,** by providing targeted support for school supplies, transportation, food, and school clothing.
- **Promote desegregation and integration into mainstream schools,** including by transferring students from segregated schools.
- **Create sustainable support mechanisms for Roma parents,** encompassing social services, housing stability, healthcare, and employment.
- **Expand the role and number of educational mediators;** provide professional development for teachers working in multicultural environments.
- **Introduce the teaching of Romani language and culture in the school curriculum,** and include Roma history (including the Holocaust and slavery) in textbooks.
- **Establish second-chance schools and digital programs** for adults to overcome illiteracy and lack of basic skills.
- **Implement systematic monitoring of the Roma strategy,** with the participation of Roma NGOs and local communities.
- **Ensure full participation of Roma in decision-making processes,** particularly at the local level, in educational policies and school governance.

CZECH REPUBLIC

- **Adopt a national plan for school desegregation, based on PAQ's six steps:**
- Map segregated schools
- Reform catchments
- Support receiving schools
- Monitor diagnostics
- Provide resources for change
- Communicate consistently

- **Institutionalise the role of Roma teaching assistants** and inclusive teams with long-term contracts, training, and career pathways.

- **Expand access to early childhood education (especially ages 2–3),** using community-based and outreach-supported models like Brouček.

- **Guarantee free school meals nationally** for children in material need to support attendance and well-being.

- **Transform stipend programmes** by reducing bureaucracy, automating eligibility, and linking financial aid to mentoring and support.

- **Invest in second-chance education and adult learning** for Roma youth who left school early, with special attention to digital access.

- **Monitor and publish ethnically disaggregated data** on school segregation, transitions, and educational outcomes in line with EU guidance.

- **Ensure that Czech compliance with the EU Roma Strategic Framework** includes measurable targets on school desegregation and ECEC access.

- **Encourage use of EU funds (e.g. ESF+, ERDF)** for long-term staffing and inclusion infrastructure, not only pilot projects.

- **Monitor the implementation of Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)** on Roma inclusion, with Roma civil society involvement.

- **Share and scale local good practices** (e.g. Krnov, Brouček, stipend mentoring) across member states through structured exchange.

HUNGARY

- **In Hungary, school dropout among Roma youth remains a significant issue, particularly at the secondary education level.**

Mentoring support for young people with fewer opportunities - the role of a mentor in supporting young people with fewer opportunities goes well beyond skills development: through a relationship of trust, they help to identify complex problems such as mental health, housing or family difficulties and act as a mediator to other professionals who can help. To be effective, mentors need support through targeted training, supervision, and increased knowledge of the local care system. An integrated, holistic approach to the design of mentoring schemes is essential.

- **One of the most pressing issues in the Hungarian education system is the school segregation of disadvantaged and Roma students.**

Standardising rules for church and state schools and redesigning enrolment boundaries would prevent segregation, including the use of busing where appropriate. Conduct a thorough review of church-run schools and their financing, ensuring transparency and, if needed, steps toward secularisation. The government should also re-engage independent civil society organisations, whose innovative approaches are essential for improving education in disadvantaged Roma communities.

- **The high level of centralisation in public education does not allow teachers to choose curricula based on pupils' abilities, competencies, and skills.**

The amount of curriculum, which is already overly lexical, is the same for children with lower and higher competencies, regardless of whether they have significant parental support or not. It is advisable to give teachers greater freedom in choosing teaching materials and methods. However, this requires increasing the level of teacher competence and motivation.

- **Teachers' training and capacity are insufficient to provide integrated education for children with special educational needs. The more Roma children there are in a class, the more likely it is that this pedagogical capacity barrier (geographical inequality) is present.**

The current uniform allocation of teaching capacity, based only on numbers, should be changed in line with teaching and learning needs, for example, by changing the centralised coordination system, increasing the role of local authorities and providing substantial income compensation for teachers of children with special educational needs. At the same time, in addition to the existing salary supplement, real mentoring, monitoring, and quality assurance for this should be introduced.

- **Public education alone cannot compensate for family disadvantages. Early Childhood Development (Baby Mama Houses, Sure Start Programme) is a good response. Still, it does not reach all families, and there are children whose family backgrounds are so disadvantaged that they cannot be compensated for.**

Increasing the efficiency of public education can only be achieved through radical reform and capacity building of the social care system, where both quality and staffing levels need to be improved. A specific action plan (programme) and the appointment of a responsible governmental actor (independent ministry for education and social affairs, which are missing) are needed to bring the social care system and public education together.

ROMANIA

- **Prioritise investment in early childhood education and care,** recognising its decisive impact on later educational achievement and long-term inclusion.

- **Address all factors contributing to school segregation without delay,** including residential separation and discriminatory enrolment practices; eligibility for EU funding should be conditional on compliance with desegregation standards.

- **Redefine educational quality beyond infrastructure,** focusing on the teaching process and introducing incentives for teachers working in disadvantaged or remote communities.

- **Strengthen measures to prevent school dropout,** expanding after-school programmes and alternative education models tailored to the needs of poor Roma communities.

- **Integrate poverty reduction into education policy,** recognising that improved living conditions and family income are essential for regular school attendance and learning success.

- **Make the fight against antigypsyism a central priority of the education system,** ensuring that prejudice and discrimination are systematically addressed through teacher training, curricula, and school culture.

SLOVAKIA

- **Strengthen Enforcement of Anti-Segregation Laws:** Ensure rigorous implementation and monitoring of existing legal frameworks prohibiting segregation in education. Introduce clear accountability mechanisms for schools and local authorities that maintain segregated practices.

- **Develop and Implement Active Desegregation Policies:** Design and implement concrete measures, such as school busing, redrawing school catchment areas, and promoting diverse enrolment, to reduce segregation, especially in municipalities with marginalised Roma communities.

- **Expand and Secure Sustainable Funding for Support Roles:** Provide stable, long-term financing for teaching assistants, tutors, and other support staff who work directly with Roma pupils, including ensuring these professionals have adequate training in Romani language and culture.

- **Increase Roma Representation Among Educators:** Promote the recruitment, training, and retention of Roma teachers at all educational levels, recognising their critical role in fostering inclusive learning environments and breaking down stereotypes.

- **Integrate Roma History, Culture, and Contributions into Curricula:** Enhance school textbooks and curricula across grades to include accurate, positive, and meaningful content about Roma communities to foster understanding and reduce prejudice.

- **Improve Early Childhood Education Access and Coordination:** Address capacity shortages in childcare and kindergartens, especially in marginalised communities, and establish coordinated policies across relevant ministries to unify early childhood education and care.

- **Increase Financial and Mentoring Support for Roma Families and Students:** Develop targeted scholarships, subsidies, and mentoring programs to alleviate economic barriers and provide guidance throughout the educational journey.

- **Prevent the Establishment of New Segregated Schools:** Review and revise policies that simplify the creation of schools in segregated areas or with lowered standards that reinforce segregation, ensuring new schools promote integration.

- **Engage Roma Communities in Policy Design and Implementation:** Involve Roma parents, educators, and civil society organisations meaningfully in shaping educational reforms to ensure policies reflect their needs and perspectives.

- **Raise Awareness and Combat Structural Antigypsyism:** Implement public education campaigns and professional development for teachers to address biases, dismantle stereotypes, and foster respect for diversity within schools and society.

SPAIN

- **Guarantee free and universal access to quality education** by removing hidden costs through school subsidies (transport, meals, equipment, digital access).
- **Combat school segregation** through robust enforcement of zoning regulations and monitoring systems, ensuring equal distribution of students and resources**.**
- **Institutionalise Roma intercultural mediators** and support staff within schools, with stable contracts and long-term public funding.
- **Strengthen early intervention and personalised support,** especially for Roma girls and migrant students, to prevent early school leaving.
- **Include Roma history, language, and culture in national and regional curricula,** with teacher training and Roma staff representation.
- **Address antigypsyism in schools** through mandatory anti-racism training for educators and effective anti-bullying protocols that include ethnic discrimination.
- **Expand second-chance education and adult learning opportunities** with flexible schedules, proximity, and childcare options.
- **Promote digital literacy and access for Roma families** through targeted public initiatives and community-led digital inclusion programmes.
- **Ensure that the National Roma Strategic Framework includes binding measures,** monitoring mechanisms, and Roma-led implementation processes.
- **Ensure stable and long-term funding for NGOs and community-led initiatives** that complement public education efforts.
- **Strengthen data collection disaggregated by ethnicity** (with appropriate safeguards) to enable effective monitoring of progress.

ADDITIONAL NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS: SWEDEN

- **Adopt specific national goals and indicators on Roma children's education,** aligned with the EU Roma Strategic Framework.

- **Ensure sustainable funding and institutionalisation of Roma mediators** across municipalities.

- **Guarantee full access to mother tongue education in Romani chib,** including recruitment and training of teachers.

- **Integrate Roma history, culture, and antigypsyism** into school curricula and teacher training, with mandatory modules.

- **Establish structured dialogue with Roma civil society** and youth on educational policies and reforms.

- **Introduce measures to improve Roma representation** among teachers and education staff.

ERGO
NETWORK