



EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

**Implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework
Roma access to quality and inclusive education**

*20 November 2025
10am – 4pm*

Conference Report

**IMPLEMENTING
THE EU ROMA
STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK**

**ROMA ACCESS
TO QUALITY
AND INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION**



**20 November 2025, 10am - 4pm
NH Brussels Carrefour de l'Europe**

ERGO
NETWORK



This conference was kindly supported by the European Union Programme for Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) and by the German Federal Foreign Office.



Conference Programme

10:30 – Opening Remarks

- Daniel Grebeldinger, ERGO Network Board / Nevo Parudimos, Romania
- Eva Schultz, Cabinet of European Commission Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu
- Hon Hristo Petrov, Member of the European Parliament, Bulgaria, Renew Europe

11:00 – Panel 1: Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, lifelong learning

Moderator: Andrei Frank, Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP)

- Dr Zuzana Havírová, ERGO Network / Roma Advocacy and Research Center, Slovakia
- Aljoša Rudaš, International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI)
- Rui Teixeira, Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
- Angeliki Giannakopoulou, European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
- Gareth Hughes, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE)
- Miriam Toplanská, European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

Q&A and interactive exchange with the audience

12:30 – Networking lunch

14:00 – Panel 2: The implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework

Moderator: Andor Ürmös, Sector Officer for Roma Inclusion, EEA and Norway Grants Office

- Szabolcs Schmidt, European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers
- Oana Tabă, Roma and Travellers Division, Council of Europe (*online*)
- Isabela Mihalache, Senior Advocacy Officer, ERGO Network
- Lavinia Banu, Coordinator *Roma Inclusion, Participation & Equality Index* (RIPE) project
- Elena Sîrbu, ROMNI, National Focal Point, Republic of Moldova

Q&A and interactive exchange with the audience

16:00 – Closing Session

- Elena Ioannou, Permanent Representation of Cyprus to the European Union
- Hon. Nela Riehl, Member of the European Parliament, Germany, Greens / EFA (*video*)
- Gabriela Hrabaňová, ERGO Network Director

On 20 November 2025, ERGO Network held its annual Policy Conference, dedicated to Roma access to quality and inclusive education and to taking stock of the implementation of the European and National Roma Strategic Frameworks, as well as of Council of Europe standards for Roma and Travellers.



The Roma are more likely to experience discrimination and inequality throughout education, training, and lifelong learning, to face lower attendance and completion rates, to be channeled into segregated or low-quality schools, or to be wrongly placed in special needs education. Skills-focused approaches alone are not enough to ensure equality and inclusion, and the lack of accessible second-chance and lifelong learning opportunities traps many Roma in persistent poverty and low skills.

The event launched ERGO Network's research report on "[Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning](#)", based on six national case studies carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, with additional benchmarking evidence from Ireland and Sweden. The second part of the event assessed the state of play of the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework and launched ERGO Network's civil society monitoring report on "[The implementation of National Roma Strategic Frameworks 2021 – 2025](#)".

The event was very well attended, with over 150 participants on site and online, and it brought together ERGO Network national members from the grassroots level, as well as other national practitioners, European civil society organisations, policymakers from the European institutions and national governments, and other relevant stakeholders.

You can read a summary of the proceedings below, as well as watch the [full recording](#), check out the [photo album](#), and read our website [news article](#) about the conference.

OPENING REMARKS

Daniel Grebeldinger ERGO Network Board

Mr Grebeldinger welcomed participants and spoke about the situation of Roma learning in Europe, stressing ERGO Network's commitment to combatting antigypsyism and Roma poverty, while strengthening (pro-)Roma civil society participation in decision-making at all levels. He outlined the structure of the event and encouraged participants and guests to join the debate for a better Europe for Roma. Mr Grebeldinger also thanked speakers, moderators, and guests, and wished all attendants a fruitful morning of discussion.

 [Access the full intervention here](#).



Eva Schultz Cabinet of Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission

Ms Schultz underlined the fundamental importance of access to quality and inclusive education, describing it as a cornerstone for participation in society. She further stressed the Commission's strong commitment to Roma inclusion within the framework of the Union of Equality. Ms Schultz highlighted that, halfway through the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework, significant challenges persisted, particularly regarding Roma poverty, social exclusion, and unequal access to education and skills. She concluded by emphasising the need to address these issues through coordinated EU policies, anti-poverty measures, sustained political commitment, and close cooperation with all stakeholders.

 [Access the full intervention here](#).

Hon Hristo Petrov MEP

European Parliament, Renew Europe, Bulgaria

Mr Petrov highlighted that Roma poverty, marginalisation and antigypsyism continued to shape the life chances of Roma children across Europe, particularly in access to quality and inclusive education. Drawing on his experience in social, employment, and education policy, he stressed that the educational gap faced by Roma children was not one of ability, but the result of structural inequalities, poor living conditions, and discrimination affecting families and communities. Mr Petrov underlined the importance of early childhood education, holistic approaches, and the complementary use of EU instruments to break intergenerational cycles of exclusion. He emphasised that sustained political will, adequate funding, and coordinated action at EU and national level were essential to ensure that every Roma child could access education.

 [Access the full intervention here.](#)

PANEL ONE

Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning





Dr Zuzana Havírová Roma Advocacy and Research Center (RARC), Slovakia / ERGO Network

Dr Havírová presented the ERGO Network 2025 research report on *Roma access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning*, based on case studies carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, with additional benchmarking evidence from Ireland and Sweden.

The key messages of the report:

1. *The Roma continue to face persistently low educational attainment and learning outcomes throughout the lifecycle.*
2. *Financial and non-financial barriers to education continue to drive dropout and high NEET rates among Roma learners.*
3. *Support for Roma learners and their families remains inconsistent, while educational mediators are underutilised.*
4. *Antigypsyism and segregation remain pervasive, while Roma language and culture are invisible in curricula.*
5. *Educational disadvantage lasts a lifetime, locking the Roma out of lifelong learning, quality employment, and social mobility.*
6. *Roma communities and their civil society organisations must be involved to co-create sustainable ways forward.*

⌚ Access the full intervention [here](#), and the research report [here](#).

Aljoša Rudaš International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI)

Mr Rudaš stressed that, 36 years after the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Roma children continued to face severe violations of their rights, particularly in access to quality and inclusive early childhood education. He highlighted that the early years, especially the first thousand days of a child's life, were foundational for children's development, yet Roma children often grew up in conditions of poverty, hunger, unstable housing and systemic discrimination that severely limited their potential. Mr Rudaš equally underlined that early childhood represented a critical and non-recoverable window of opportunity, calling for urgent systemic change to ensure that Roma children's rights, development, and potential were fully protected from the very start of life.

⌚ Access the full intervention [here](#).



Rui Teixeira

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)



Mr Teixeira stressed that inclusion was a core priority of OBESSU's work representing school students across Europe. He highlighted that Roma students continued to face systemic barriers to quality and inclusive education, such as segregation, discrimination, lack of mediation and support services, and persistent antigypsyism within schools. He underlined the need for stronger national inclusion policies, curricular reform reflecting cultural diversity and Roma history, and clear mechanisms to prevent and address racism in education. He concluded by emphasising the importance of Roma students' participation in decision-making and called for a shift from pilot initiatives towards lasting structural change.

[Access the full intervention here](#)

Angeliki Giannakopoulou

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

Ms Giannakopoulou explained how adult education and lifelong learning were essential to address the systemic exclusion, segregation and antigypsyism faced by Roma communities. She stressed that adult learning played a key role in breaking cycles of disadvantage by offering second chances, building confidence, and empowering communities to challenge oppressive systems. Ms Giannakopoulou underlined the importance of learner-centred, inclusive, and adequately supported adult education provision, with attention to practical barriers such as childcare and income support. She concluded by emphasising that real change required systemic commitment, meaningful participation, and sustained action.

[Access the full intervention here](#)



Gareth Hughes

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE)



Mr Hughes welcomed the report, and stressed that persistent inequalities in Roma access to education, including segregation and antigypsyism, required coordinated long-term responses. He underlined that inclusive education must ensure participation for learners and highlighted the importance of desegregation, culturally responsive teaching, monitoring and participation. Mr Hughes emphasised the need for sustainable funding, capacity building and well-trained teachers, concluding that inclusive education was essential for Roma equality and Europe's social cohesion.

[Access the full intervention here](#)

Miriam Toplanská European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture

Ms Toplanská highlighted that Roma children continued to face significant barriers to inclusive and quality education, particularly in early childhood education and care, where participation gaps persist. She underlined strong links between socio-economic disadvantage, segregation and poor educational outcomes, noting wide disparities across Member States. Ms Toplanská stressed that the Commission closely monitors these trends through the Education and Training Monitor and the European Semester and encourages use of EU funds to advance desegregation, inclusion and equal access.



[*Access the full intervention here.*](#)

Q&A and interactive exchange with the audience Moderated by Andrei Frank, Lifelong Learning Platform

Mr Frank invited the audience to join in a brief "talk to your neighbour" exercise, where participants discussed among themselves (and on sli.do) about the most impactful solution for Roma to enjoy better access to education, training, and lifelong learning.

What is the best, single solution to improve Roma access to quality and inclusive education?

Wordcloud Poll · 34 responses

Using the common wisdom and empathy

Fight antigypsyism antiantigypsyism Funding

More fund improv housing end segregation Ch

better funding parent support

Fighting antigypsyism end discrimination antipoverty

Work with teachers and school directors Desegregation end poverty

Work family separation European funds

Girls empowerment and mentoring

antiantigypsyism improv housing parent support end segregation Ch antipoverty end poverty more investment! Eradiciting poverty European funds

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Mr Frank summarised the session and the main points raised by the various speakers, while also providing the perspective of the Lifelong Learning Platform.



He stressed that inclusion and lifelong learning were central to building democratic education systems that respond to the realities of Roma learners across all stages of learning. He highlighted persistent gaps in Roma participation in early childhood education, basic skills attainment and adult learning, calling for a redefinition of inclusion that reflects intersectionality, diversity of learners, and decolonised curricula.

Mr Frank emphasised the need to empower Roma learners through learner-centred approaches, break down financial and non-financial barriers, and strengthen systemic cooperation across education, social, health and housing services. He concluded by underlining the importance of evidence-based policies and stronger links between research, practice and civil society.

 [**Access the full intervention here**](#)



PANEL TWO

The implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework



Szabolcs Schmidt

European Commission, DG Justice & Consumers, Roma and Non-Discrimination Unit



Mr Schmidt outlined the strengthened EU Roma Strategic Framework, highlighting its three equal pillars of equality, inclusion, and participation, with a strong focus on combating antigypsyism as a root cause of exclusion. He welcomed Member States' initial commitment and the adoption of the Council Recommendation, but stressed that progress on the ground remained far too slow. Mr Schmidt emphasised that persistent discrimination and antigypsyism continued to undermine socio-economic gains, and concluded by underlining the importance of robust monitoring, clear targets, and meaningful involvement of civil society in assessing implementation.

[Access the full intervention here](#)

Oana Tabă

Council of Europe, Roma and Travellers Division

Ms Tabă highlighted the Council of Europe's long-standing commitment to Roma inclusion through legal standards, monitoring mechanisms, and targeted programmes, including in inclusive education, participation and empowerment of women and youth. She acknowledged that, while progress had been made, structural change remained slow, largely due to persistent antigypsyism, limited meaningful participation, and repeated crises. Ms Tabă underlined that the upcoming Council of Europe Roma Strategy 2026–2030 would place equality, dignity, participation, and evidence-based policies at its core, stressing the need for stronger implementation, better governance, and more political commitment at national and local levels.

[Access the full intervention here](#)

Isabela Mihalache ERGO Network



Ms Mihalache, the author, presented the methodology and key findings of ERGO Network's 2025 civil society monitoring report on the implementation of National Roma Strategic Frameworks. She explained that the survey assessed progress across areas including education, housing, employment, health, Roma participation, funding, and the fight against antigypsyism. Ms Mihalache stressed that, while commitments had increased, implementation remained slow and fragmented and antigypsyism was identified as the strongest cross-cutting barrier. She concluded by reminding that impact on the ground did not match the stated ambitions, while Roma participation remained symbolic, and funding for Roma inclusion was insufficient and unstable.

ⓘ [Access the full intervention here](#), and the civil society monitoring report [here](#).

Lavinia Banu Coordinator *Roma Inclusion, Participation & Equality Index (RIPE) project*

Ms Banu presented the findings of a Council of Europe capacity-building initiative aimed at assessing Roma and Traveller inclusion across several countries, using standardised civil society reporting. She highlighted persistent implementation gaps in national strategies, particularly regarding segregation in education and housing, discrimination in employment, and limited access to healthcare. Ms Banu concluded by stressing the need for stronger accountability, improved data collection, sustainable funding, and more structured consultation with Roma civil society.

ⓘ [Access the full intervention here](#).



Elena Sîrbu Roma Women Platform ROMNI, Moldova / National Focal Point RIPE project



Ms Sîrbu reflected on Roma inclusion in Moldova in the context of EU enlargement, noting both opportunities and pressure to align with EU standards. She highlighted persistent challenges, including deep socio-economic marginalisation, unequal access to services, and discrimination, despite some institutional and service-level progress. Ms Sîrbu stressed that implementation lagged behind strategy due to limited capacity, financing, and accountability, concluding that sustained political commitment, meaningful Roma participation, and strong cooperation with EU institutions were essential.

ⓘ [Access the full intervention here](#).

Q&A and interactive exchange with the audience

Moderated by Andor Ürmös, EEA and Norway Grants office

On site and online participants were asked to use sli.do to contribute their thoughts:

Where do you see the biggest implementation gap in National Roma Strategic Frameworks?

Fighting antigypsyism - 67%

Education - 17%

Employment - 17%

Which factor most limits implementation at national level?

Lack of political will - 83%

Lack of monitoring & indicators - 17%

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The discussion focused strongly on the gap between policy commitments and real change on the ground. Participants repeatedly highlighted that, while strategies, legal frameworks, and funding existed, implementation remained slow, uneven, and often disconnected from local realities. Persistent antigypsyism, weak enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, unreliable or politicised data, and limited accountability were identified as key structural barriers. Several interventions stressed that progress cannot be measured only through formal reporting, but that it must also reflect lived realities at community level.



A recurring theme was the need for meaningful Roma participation throughout the policy cycle, not only in consultation but in decision-making, implementation and monitoring. Participants questioned the effectiveness of National Roma Contact Points where Roma voices were marginal or absent, and raised concerns about symbolic participation, gatekeeping practices, and lack of capacity or openness. Civil society representatives underlined that without sustained funding, institutional recognition, and space to monitor human rights violations, Roma civil society organisations cannot effectively hold authorities accountable or challenge antigypsyism.

Mr Ürmös summarised the discussions, highlighting also the importance of linking Roma inclusion more clearly to mainstream anti-poverty, education, and social policies, including adult education and child protection. He stressed that antigypsyism was a societal problem, requiring broader education and awareness beyond Roma communities themselves. Mr Ürmös reminded that participants agreed that stronger local implementation, transparent use of funds, independent monitoring, and a renewed focus on human rights enforcement were essential for strategies to deliver tangible improvements rather, than remain formal exercises.



CLOSING SESSION

Elena Ioannou

Social Attaché, Permanent Representation of Cyprus to the European Union

Ms Ioannou reaffirmed Cyprus' strong commitment to the objectives of the EU Roma Strategic Framework, noting that although the Roma community in Cyprus was small, national policies were closely aligned with the challenges and priorities discussed during the event. She explained that Roma inclusion in Cyprus was embedded within broader social policies, including education, social protection, housing, and anti-discrimination, with the National Roma Contact Point coordinating implementation. Looking ahead to Cyprus' upcoming EU Presidency, Ms Ioannou outlined key priorities closely linked to Roma inclusion, such as strengthening the EU social model, advancing the European Pillar of Social Rights, supporting the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, and promoting the forthcoming EU Anti-Racism Strategy. She also highlighted a strong focus on combating child poverty through the European Child Guarantee, improving access to quality early childhood education and care, advancing disability inclusion, and working closely with civil society. Ms Ioannou concluded by stating support for the upcoming Roma Week 2026.

[Access the full intervention here](#)



Hon Nela Riehl (*video message*) European Parliament, Greens / EFA, Germany



Ms Riehl underlined that Roma inclusion was a matter of fundamental rights, equality, and justice, not a technical policy issue. She stressed that segregation, limited access to early childhood education, discrimination and tokenistic participation continues to undermine Roma opportunities, despite existing strategies. Despite some positive country examples, she identified antigypsyism as the root cause of persistent exclusion. Ms Riehl called for meaningful, well-resourced Roma participation, long-term funding in the next EU budget, and stronger accountability to ensure policies reflect realities on the ground. She reaffirmed her personal commitment to fighting antigypsyism and promoting inclusive education in the EP.

 [Access the full intervention here](#)

Jamen Gabriela Hrabaňová Director, ERGO Network

Ms Hrabaňová closed the conference by reaffirming ERGO Network's commitment to working with European institutions and stakeholders to ensure Roma rights and inclusion are realised at grassroots level. She stressed the importance of keeping Roma inclusion and the Union of Equality high on Europe's agenda, including in future strategies and the next EU budget. Reflecting on the two panels, she highlighted education and lifelong learning as fundamental rights, and underscored both good practices and persistent gaps in implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework, including in candidate countries. She concluded by thanking participants and encouraging continued engagement and action in support of Roma equality and inclusion.

 [Access the full intervention here](#)

EVALUATION SURVEY



PROJECT REFERENCE

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ACTIVITY TITLE

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*This report was compiled by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Adviser,
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*To find out more about this event, or about ERGO Network's work,
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