

The logo features the word "ERGO" in a bold, white, sans-serif font inside a dark purple circle. Below it, the word "Network" is written in a white, outlined, sans-serif font, partially overlapping the purple circle and a larger, faint white circle behind it.

ERGO
Network

A purple circular logo containing the text "European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network" in white, sans-serif font, arranged in four lines.

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ROMA ACCESS TO DECENT AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

**in Bulgaria, Czech Republic,
Hungary, Romania, Slovakia,
Spain**

**With additional benchmarking
evidence from Ireland**

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 2024. Members in Bulgaria (Integro Association), the Czech Republic (Slovo 21), Hungary (Autonómia Foundation), Romania (Nevo Parudimos), Slovakia (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre), and Spain (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia) have provided direct evidence through in-depth national case studies. ERGO Network members in Ireland (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre) contributed additional benchmarking evidence.

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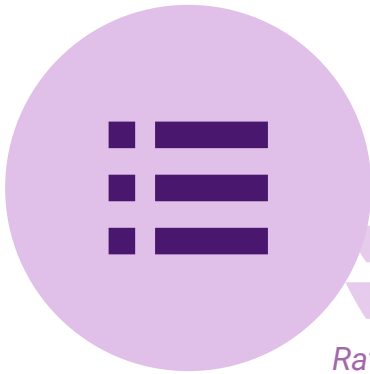


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"When a person wants to work and is not allowed to just because they have a different skin colour... because they are Roma... then they are out of luck."

Roma man, Czech Republic



KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



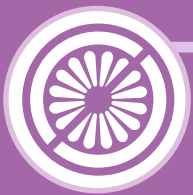
A majority of Roma are not in paid work, at least not in the formal economy, nor are they adequately supported to enter the labour market.

Urgent and significant investment is needed into integrated, personalised Active Inclusion approaches, combining income support with enabling services, as well as into Public Employment Services to have the necessary resources, staff, and training.



The Roma who work are in poor-quality jobs with low pay, insecure contracts, unsafe working conditions, no access to training, and almost no trade union coverage.

Countries need to develop and implement a comprehensive definition of job quality, covering all aspects mentioned above, and ensure that it applies to all jobs, all sectors, and all workers, as well as support and strengthen trade unions and collective bargaining.



Antigypsyism is pervasive in recruitment as well as in the workplace.

Much stronger anti-discrimination legislation is needed, coupled with effective implementation mechanisms and monitoring, anti-bias training for employers and recruiters, and broad campaigns to combat antigypsyism in society at large.





Pushed to the margins of the labour market, the Roma make ends meet through the informal economy, pursuing traditional crafts, or seeking work abroad.

Combating undeclared work needs to be done by regularising sectors and penalising rogue employers instead of poor workers; broader support schemes for self-employment and more protection for mobile workers are needed to prevent exploitation.



Job creation efforts that would benefit the Roma are scarce – and while the social economy holds great potential for Roma employment, it is currently under-utilised.

More public investment is needed in locally accessible, community-rooted quality jobs, as well as supportive legislation and improved access to funding for social enterprises as a key tool for Roma employment, including the promotion of Roma social entrepreneurship.



Participation of Roma communities and their civil society organisations is paramount in order to co-create sustainable ways forward.

Policy makers and labour market 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

As Europe turns increasingly neoliberal, an *employment-first* approach is now dominant in the policy discourse, an approach entirely inadequate to support many Roma coming from a background of poverty, discrimination, and low skills.

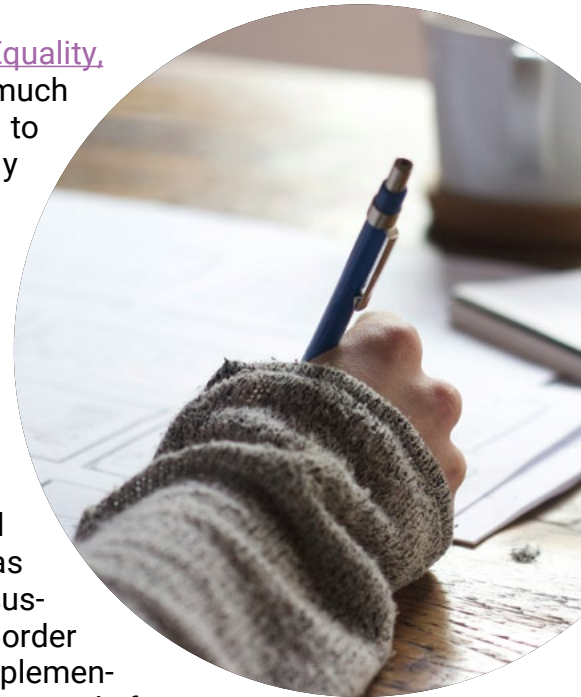


The Roma are much more likely to experience discrimination in accessing employment as well as in the workplace, to be paid less for equal work (ethnic pay gap), to be offered precarious contracts or “Roma jobs”, to be overlooked for promotions or learning opportunities, and to be given dangerous or unsuitable tasks. While overrepresented in unsustainable and exploitative forms of employment, the Roma are also underrepresented in trade union structures. Additionally, many Roma earn their livelihood from atypical or seasonal forms of work, which are not covered by adequate labour protection legislation and do not provide for employment rights and social security.

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 and sustainable employment” by 2030. This objective is further broken down into three targets, namely to *cut the employment gap by at least half* (ensuring that at least 60% of Roma are in paid work), to *cut the gender employment gap by at least half* (ensuring that at least 45% of Roma women are in paid work), and to *cut the gap in the NEET rate by at least half* (ensuring that less than one in three young Roma is not in education, employment or training). While welcome, these targets overlook many other relevant aspects of Roma quality employment, as detailed in this report.

Encouragingly, the [Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation](#) of 12 March 2021 includes a much more comprehensive section calling on Member States to “promote effective equal access for Roma, particularly young Roma, to quality and sustainable employment”. There is a long list of proposed measures for this objective, but it falls short of addressing job quality. Access to quality and sustainable employment is also extensively covered by the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (Social Pillar), chiefly in its Principles 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, while decent work is Goal 8 of the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

With this report, ERGO Network aims to provide data and strong grassroots evidence about Roma concerns, as well as good practices, regarding Roma access to decent and sustainable employment 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 and the European Semester (including the Recovery and Resilience process, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals). The findings of this report will also feed into advocacy around relevant policy initiatives at national level.



Methodology

Between April and September 2024, ERGO Network researchers in **Bulgaria** (Integro Association), the **Czech Republic** (Slovo 21), **Hungary** (Autonómia Foundation), **Romania** (Nevo Parudimos), **Slovakia** (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre) and **Spain** (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia) prepared comprehensive national case studies about Roma access to decent and sustainable employment in their country.

In **Bulgaria**, desk research of relevant information sources was complemented with the results of a survey conducted in the framework of ROMACT in more than 20 municipalities across the country, with a specific focus on Roma employment and unemployment. This work was further enriched by the collection of additional information through focus groups in the community and individual interviews with community leaders and representatives of local authorities.

In the **Czech Republic**, the methodology included an in-depth review and analysis of existing data available in the country, updated by 7 in-depth semi-structured interviews with respondents from four regions with a greater concentration of Roma, specifically from municipalities with a population of over 30 000.

Read the Czech Republic's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

Read Bulgaria's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

In **Hungary**, desk research was conducted to cover and analyse the relevant studies published on the topic in the past period, coupled with the experiences of relevant programmes carried out by the Autonómia Foundation over the years. The case study mostly uses national data, illustrated in some cases by some specific Roma examples.

Read Hungary's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

In **Romania**, the research methodology combined two approaches. On the one hand, desk research was carried out on national programmes, legislation, and initiatives aimed at supporting Roma into employment. Additionally, 20 interviews were conducted with Roma who tried to access these initiatives in different parts of Romania, and 10 interviews were conducted with staff employed in Public Employment Services and other relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation.

Read Romania's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

In **Slovakia**, the research relied on the secondary analysis of documents, research studies, and state policies in the area of employment from a Roma perspective. It is important to note that statistical data is based on attributed ethnicity or

on information from the Atlas of Roma Communities, because in Slovakia it is not possible to collect information based on ethnicity. The secondary analysis was supplemented with data collected through many years of research in marginalised Roma communities.

Read Slovakia's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

In **Spain**, desk research covered the main available studies and reports on Roma employment, including research conducted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Spain, as well as data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers team. The case study also draws on the organisation's many years of experience with Roma employment programmes in Catalonia.

Read Spain's national case study on Roma access to decent and sustainable employment [here](#).

Our members **Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre** provided additional benchmarking input for **Ireland** based on their comprehensive research report "Roma in Ireland: Access to Fair and Decent Work", developed together with the Maynooth University in 2023.

Read Ireland's research report [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 employment situation in the countries covered by the report, as well as at the obstacles that the Roma face in accessing decent and sustainable employment in these countries.
- Concrete recommendations for improving the availability, accessibility, quality, sustainability, and inclusiveness of jobs and employment for Roma.

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. The participating researchers and national contributors endorsed it in October 2024.

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 mobilization 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 enforcing human rights, democratic procedures, transparency, partnership and trust in the community

and society. For more information: www.integrobg.org/en/.

DiS. David Beňák, Ph.D. is a prominent Czech Roma personality who has collaborated for this case study with the staff of **Slovo 21 (Czech Republic)**, an organisation founded in 1999 and devoted to the successful inclusion of the Roma into Czech society. Instead of providing direct support, they empower and emancipate Roma to articulate their inclusion needs and solutions independently. They have extensive research experience in various fields, and they also work closely with national and international partners to implement diverse projects in education, gender equality, social inclusion, art and culture, capacity building, and advocacy. The team brings together Roma, Czechs, and foreigners, coming together to influence the lives of people in need positively. For more information: <https://www.slovo21.cz/>.

Miklós Kóródi and **Tibor Béres** 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. It aims 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.

Daniel Grebeldinger is the Executive Director of **Nevo Parudimos (Romania)**, a non-governmental organisation founded in 2008 by a group of teachers, Roma activists, and representatives of the Roma community. The main aim of the work is to reduce economic, educational, and cultural differences between Roma and the majority of society. Since its creation, the organisation has been involved in multiple research ventures and has coordinated and implemented countless projects directly in Roma communities with national and international partners. For more information: <https://nevoparudimos.ro/?lang=en>.

Zuzana Havírová 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 shaping 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 supports 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 and is involved in national and international activities. For more information: www.romadata.org.

Bianca Galusca is the Head of the European and International Area and of the Participation and Youth Area of **FAGiC - Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (Spain)**. This is an umbrella organisation created in 1991, bringing together 96 local Roma associations from all over Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in Catalonia. FAGiC was created with the aim of defending and promoting the rights of the Roma within Catalan society and denouncing any form of xenophobia or discrimination towards the Roma population. Its primary purpose is to improve actions aimed at the Roma, gather information about their aspirations and concerns, and establish a communication channel between the Roma and the rest of the Catalan society. 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, exclusion, antigypsyism**, and very poor overall socio-economic indicators. This pre-existing state of dire inequality, on the backdrop of **widespread, historical antigypsyism**, was **made worse in recent years** by the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** and associated measures, recent **spikes in inflation and cost of living**, and an ongoing state of warfare and corresponding **budget cuts for equality and inclusion**.

In **Bulgaria**, the Roma are one of the most marginalized communities, often living in poverty and social isolation. Many lack access to quality education and healthcare, significantly limiting their professional development and personal growth opportunities. 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 was 63.2%, while the part of Roma at risk of poverty and social exclusion was 81.6% compared to 25% for persons from the Bulgarian ethnic group. 43.5% of Roma live in poor housing conditions, 76.9% live in overcrowded housing, and 34.7% live in housing without a toilet and bathroom inside the home.

Over 70% of Roma children live in poor housing conditions compared to less than 10% of non-Roma children.

The lack of employment and income limits access to healthcare for many working-age Roma (18-64 years old) due to insufficient funds to pay for health insurance contributions, excluding them from receiving medical care. Widespread stereotypes and antigypsyism hinder the integration of the Roma into society and the economy.

In the **Czech Republic**, the lack of education, limited employment opportunities, substandard housing, and poorer health create a vicious cycle of poverty and marginalization. Segregation in primary schools results in lower educational attainment. Only a small percentage of Roma children complete secondary education, and even fewer pursue higher education. Roma often encounter discrimination in the labour market, leading to higher unemployment rates and employment in unskilled and low-paid positions. Many Roma work in the informal economy, negatively impacting their social security and working conditions. The unemployment rate for Roma aged 20-64 is around 11.8%, compared to 2.8% in the general population. The Roma often reside in segregated and socially excluded areas with poorer living conditions. The health status of the Roma population living in these excluded

localities is generally worse compared to the majority population, and they have limited access to healthcare and preventive services.

In **Hungary**, the Roma population, which accounts for around 6-8% of the Hungarian population, is the poorest, most excluded, and most vulnerable group in society. The gap between the Roma and the majority has been growing since the change of regime, mainly due to segregation in housing as well as in other aspects of day-to-day life, especially in education. Moreover, the educational and labour market position of Roma remains weak, leading to persistent and deepening poverty. This is often coupled with a negative, often hostile, climate surrounding Roma, which is reflected in prejudice and discrimination from the majority. A significant proportion of the Roma live in segregated settlements, where housing and living conditions are significantly worse than the national average and than those of non-Roma living in the immediate vicinity.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, 75% of Roma in Hungary live below the poverty line.

The share of early school leavers among young people aged 18-24 was 68%, and a quarter of Roma aged 45 and over had not completed any formal education. Income poverty rates are closely correlated with the concentration of Roma in settlements: the proportion of Roma living below the poverty line was highest in areas where respondents perceived that Roma residents lived 'exclusively' or 'predominantly' in segregated conditions.

In **Romania**, the Roma face significant socio-economic challenges that have persisted for decades, as they are one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the country. High levels of poverty and unemployment are prevalent among the Roma population, largely due to limited access to quality education and discrimination in the labour market. Many Roma live in segregated communities with poor housing conditions, inadequate access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation, and limited healthcare facilities. This socio-economic exclusion perpetuates a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Additionally, the Roma often encounter systemic discrimination and antigypsyism, which exacerbate their economic hardships.

Despite various governmental and non-governmental efforts to improve their situation, progress has been slow. Initiatives have had limited success, partly due to persistent prejudice and insufficient implementation of policies. Consequently, the Roma community continues to struggle with significant barriers to achieving socio-economic equality.

In **Slovakia**, according to the Atlas of Roma Communities, there are about 400 000 Roma, of which 46.5% live integrally among the majority population in the same socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in settlements within the municipality, 23.6% live in settlements on the outskirts of the municipality and 18.4% live in segregated communities. Most Roma live in the Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov regions, where we also find the largest number of segregated Roma communities. The majority of these communities are rural, with a smaller proportion located in urban areas.

In these communities, several disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate: the unemployment rate for Roma living there is 38%, with 85% of residents living below the official poverty line (compared to 12.2% in the general population).

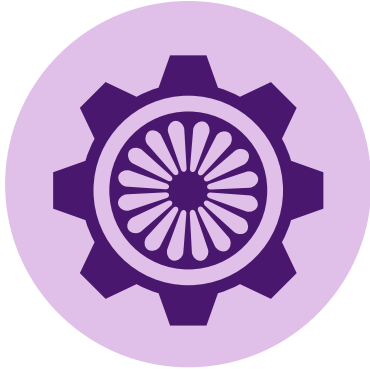
About 17% live on less than € 3.8 per day. Children under the age of 15 make up more than a third of marginalised Roma communities (36%), while the share of people older than 64 years in these communities is three times lower than in the general population (5% to 17%).

In **Spain**, the majority of the Roma population suffers from severe inequality and lack of access to economic and social rights. Poverty and exclusion affect over 80% of Roma, particularly children.

Only 17% of Roma over the age of 16 have completed obligatory or higher education, compared to almost 80% of the general population.

Only 34% of Roma declared being in good health, as opposed to 48.8% of the general population, while there is an increase in Roma living in 'irregular situations' (squatting). The situation of migrant Roma communities in Spain, particularly those from Eastern Europe, is even more precarious as they face language barriers, legal challenges around their residence status, and extreme marginalization, further complicating their access to healthcare, housing, and employment. Roma women fare worse than Roma men and than non-Roma women and affects their access to employment, education, and services.





ROMA ACCESS TO DECENT AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

All six countries report that **a majority of Roma are not in paid work**, whether they are unemployed or inactive, as their **access to employment is significantly impaired** compared to the majority population. When out of a job, Roma jobseekers benefit from very little support, as **most are unable to access unemployment benefits** due to multiple barriers, while Public Employment Services are **ill-equipped to provide a comprehensive, tailor-made approach** that would effectively help Roma into quality and sustainable jobs.

Those who manage to access work find themselves in **unskilled, low-paid, low-prestige, precarious jobs** with no employment security, limited employment rights, and **underrepresentation** in trade union structures.

Moreover, Roma workers face **rampant antigypsyism both in recruitment as well as in the workplace**, exhibited by local public and private employment agencies, employers, coworkers, customers, and society at large. Constantly pushed to the margins of the regular labour market, many Roma end up in the **informal economy**, falling back on **traditional crafts** or taking up **seasonal, occasional employment**, which is often unregulated and exploitative. There are **not enough job creation efforts** that would provide quality, sustainable, community-rooted employment that the Roma can access. While **social economy, including Work Integration Social Enterprises, holds great potential** to support the Roma into decent work, it is **insufficiently supported and utilised**. Benchmarking across the dimensions summarised above reveals a **very similar picture** of the plight of **Roma trying to access employment in Ireland**.

The following chapters delve into the details of these harsh realities, and propose some possible ways forward, including **reaping the full potential of social economy** and investing in other subsidised public employment schemes. It remains key to **support better Roma access to the open labour market** through more inclusive measures combining income and services for Roma jobseekers, rooting out low pay and labour market segmentation, improving Roma trade union coverage, and combatting discrimination and antigypsyism in employment and in the wider society.



Where do the Roma work?

The majority of the Roma in the six countries are not in paid work, with unemployment rates far higher than the majority population, a trend affecting women and young people significantly worse.

The main identified reasons are **low skills** (from lack of basic education to lack of specialised qualifications), **Roma concentration in rural, remote, and disadvantaged areas** (with few working opportunities, particularly good jobs); and widespread, deep-seated, historical **antigypsyism**. Roma workers are much more likely to involuntarily **work part-time or on temporary or seasonal contracts**, as well as in the **informal economy**. The Roma in the reviewed countries are mainly employed in sectors needing regular, intense physical work, such as **agriculture or construction**, but also in **services and the hospitality sector**, though usually in minimum wage, back-of-house jobs, such as **cleaning, unskilled labour, maintenance**, etc. Some still practice **traditional income-generating activities**, such as street vending, recycling, foraging, or crafts and artisanal production.

In **Bulgaria**, the majority of working-age Roma are unemployed or inactive (52.8%), compared to 19.8% of ethnic Bulgarians, and most are in rural areas. The share of young Roma who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) is 53.6% (69.8% of young Roma women and 39.5% of Roma men), compared to 11.7% of ethnic Bulgarians and 22.5% of ethnic Turks. Many Roma work unskilled, seasonal,

and low-paid jobs in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and services, mostly as cleaners, janitors, and support staff in hotels and restaurants. A small percentage engage in market trading and street vending. Most Roma work on temporary or seasonal contracts, and atypical employment and work in the informal sector are common.

In the **Czech Republic**, the unemployment rate of the Roma population aged 20–64 was 11.8% and the employment rate 49.6% in 2021, compared to 2.8% and 80% of the general population. 6.8% of Roma work without a written employment contract, but field experience indicates a higher number. 34.1% of Roma work on a fixed-term contract (compared to 5.3% of the majority), which means high job insecurity. 47% of young Roma are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs), compared to only 7% of non-Roma. Research indicates that the Roma are primarily employed in areas such as construction, agriculture, manual work in industry, cleaning services, gastronomy and hospitality. Unemployment is worse in rural and remote areas.

In **Hungary**, the Roma employment rate in 2021 was 45.9% (57.8% for men and 34.3% for women), while that of the majority stood at 77.9%. The proportion of Roma youth not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) was almost 40% in 2021, compared to 9% among non-Roma. This low employment rate is mainly determined by the low educational level and geographical distribution of Roma workers.

More than one-third of Roma had a fixed-term contract in 2021, compared to only 5% of non-Roma.

Roma workers are more likely to be employed in seasonal agricultural work or unskilled labour, with a high share of temporary and informal work.

In **Romania**, there is high Roma unemployment with significant gender disparities and a reliance on informal, low-skilled work mainly due to low level of education. The employment rate for Roma men is around 40% and around 19% for Roma women, significantly lower than for their non-Roma peers, while estimates about Roma unemployment range from 35% to 50%. Young Roma experience extremely high levels of unemployment and low educational attainment.

The Roma predominantly work in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, often in the informal sector or in seasonal and atypical employment.

Common sectors include agriculture, construction, street vending and recycling, the service sector (in cleaning and maintenance), crafts and artisanal work.



In **Slovakia**, while the employment rate of Roma from marginalised Roma communities has increased, it still significantly lags behind the general population. 12% of Roma from these communities who are employed report working less than 30 hours a week, a much higher figure than integrated Roma or non-Roma. An overwhelming majority (71%) state that they would like to work more. Studies show that Roma from marginalised communities are likely to be employed in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, cleaning, and services.

In **Spain**, the employment rate among the Roma population is around 30-40%, considerably lower than that of the general population, while their unemployment is around 36%, compared to the national average of around 14% (in 2021). The employment rate of Roma women is significantly lower than that of men, only 18%, reflecting cultural factors, educational disparities, and discrimination.

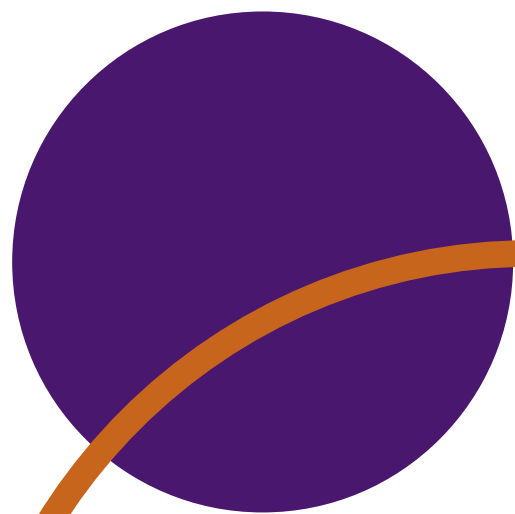
Over 60% of young Roma are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), compared to the national average of around 14%.

Roma often work in sectors that require low skill levels, such as agriculture, construction, street vending, and cleaning services. These jobs are usually informal and lack job security and entitlements, which reflects broader challenges of social exclusion and limited access to formal job opportunities.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Throughout this report, when benchmarking with Ireland, references are to the **Roma who arrived in Ireland** over the past decades from other European countries, primarily from Eastern Europe – and not to the indigenous **Irish Travellers**. There are approximately 16 000 Roma currently living in Ireland. [Research](#) by Pavee Point from 2018 found that only 16.7% of respondents reported that they were in employment, while they also reported doing informal work and engaging in different income-generating activities, such as selling at markets and fairs.

They are also most commonly employed in precarious working arrangements and in unsafe and exploitative conditions, in low-skilled jobs.



Active support to employment

In all countries, there is **little evidence of personalised, comprehensive pathway approaches**, responding to complex and individual needs and providing wrap-around support. Instead, there is a **proliferation of punitive activation practices**, including sanctions and benefit withdrawal for failure to comply with rigid, demanding, and overcomplex processes or for refusal of any job offered, no matter the conditions.

Public Employment Services do not have enough staff to provide more tailor-made support to beneficiaries, and the existing staff **lacks the necessary training to deal with Roma-specific concerns** and circumstances. Last but not least, **antigypsyism persists** both within public and private employment offices, as well as in the open labour market. Public programmes aimed at supporting Roma into employment often prove ineffective, as they **lack a strong anti-discrimination component**.

The **EU Council Recommendation for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** urges Member States to adopt a wide range of measures to:

- “promote **equal access to employment** in both the public and the private sector through measures such as positive action and support schemes for employers, as well as **improve the access to employment services** including active labour market policies
- address the needs of young Roma who are unemployed and inactive Roma by tailoring **individualised, holistic action plans for them, that take into account their preferences and motivation, barriers and disadvantages**, and reasons for being unemployed or inactive
- **reach out to young Roma** in order to raise their awareness of the available, preferably integrated, employment and social services, as well as to link them to those services
- support **first work experience**, job placements, apprenticeships and career development
- facilitate the **transition from education to employment** through coaching, mentoring, vocational training, traineeships, business incubators, and dual education
- support the **acquisition of digital skills by Roma people**, in order to be better equipped for labour market demand and exploit the opportunities offered in daily life by existing and new digital tools and trends.”

In **Bulgaria**, the assistance provided through initiatives aimed at supporting Roma into work is deemed inefficient, insufficient, top-down, and not rooted in local needs and specificities. Trainings offered are often inadequate, and some Roma cannot even access them because of educational requirements which are unrealistic and unnecessary. Roma job-seekers are pressured to accept any

available job, regardless of quality and conditions, and refusal results in strict punitive measures such as the withdrawal of benefits. Public Employment Services often lack the staff, the resources, and the necessary training to support Roma, and there is a lack of coordination between different services.

Many Roma could not enrol in professional training courses because they had not completed at least 8th or 10th-grade education. At the same time, these Roma had worked in this profession for many years and were in high demand. Without the professional qualification this training provides, they are forced to continue to work for others, often without labour contracts. The alternative was to return to school for 3-4 years and then enrol in the needed qualification course or continue working in the informal sector – a choice that is easy to predict.

Bulgaria



In the **Czech Republic**, policy initiatives to support better Roma access to the labour market include retraining courses, support for job creation, community service work, and counselling services. However, some are too recent for results to be analysed, and there is no disaggregated information for others, so the number of Roma beneficiaries is unknown. The efficacy of these initiatives for the Roma is hindered by anti-gypsyism on behalf of Public Employment Services.

In **Hungary**, support for the long-term unemployed, including disadvantaged categories such as the Roma, covers subsidies for employers as well as a scheme of public job creation, with poor pay and working conditions and a lock-in effect. Between 2016 and 2023, there was an EU-funded flagship programme specifically aimed at training and employing people with low educational qualifications, which included individual mentoring of participants, but no information is yet available on its effectiveness.

In **Romania**, specific employment measures for Roma are in place, but they feel pro-forma, as there are no additional resources for them. There is also no supportive, tailored approach because offices have insufficient staff, don't have the necessary training, and overly standardised

procedures that do not allow for customisation. These formalities are very difficult to understand for many Roma, who fall through the cracks. Public Employment Services are also not prepared to deal with the multiple needs of Roma jobseekers, requiring complex interventions.

There are very few situations when we can speak about integrated, individualised pathways that include access to counselling, training, and financial support for the ones searching for a job. This integrated approach can be seen mainly in EU-funded projects or in the work of civil society organisations.

Romania

In **Slovakia**, an unemployed person has to comply with a series of requirements, such as frequent regular visits to the Public Employment Service and accepting any job offered, even if it is more than 50km away from the place of residence, incredibly low-paid, or otherwise unsuitable. They otherwise risk benefit withdrawal, removal from the register, interruption of assistance, and loss of health insurance. A number of research findings suggest that this has led many Roma to seek employment through other channels and to rarely turn to the Public Employment Services.

In **Spain**, there are some cases when personalised assistance and tailored vocational training are provided in collaboration with the community and civil society organisations. However, most Public Employment Services buy into the stereotypical narrative that "the Roma don't want to work" and, hence, they impose sanctions or pressure individuals to accept any available job, regardless of its stability or suitability. Despite some efforts to tailor support to the unique needs of the Roma, significant challenges remain due to limited resources and institutional bias.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Mainstream employment services are not particularly accessible and effective for the Roma and their multi-faceted needs, such as low levels of education (including literacy and language barriers), poor and deteriorating health (including mental health), spatial isolation and weak transport links, poverty and material deprivation, and discrimination – all of which act as powerful barriers to securing employment. The recently-adopted Pathways to Work initiative foresees a number of potentially useful commitments, including engaging with community representative bodies to produce Traveller (and/or Roma)- specific employment service engagement tools and consulting with stakeholders from the Traveller (and/or Roma) community to advise the Public Employment Services. The recent National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II also commits to developing a Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Plan.

Access to unemployment benefits

In most of the six countries, Roma take-up of unemployment benefits remains limited, as many Roma have a patchy employment history, thus not meeting eligibility criteria for the minimum duration for social security contributions.

Also, people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, including Roma, have a hard time meeting the rigid requirements that unemployment benefit claimants must observe – while non-compliance or evidence of any additional income in the household can trigger curtailing or even withdrawal of entitlements.

Most countries report that the level of benefits is very low, and disbursing offices often have a discriminatory attitude towards Roma claimants and people in poverty.

Most Roma prefer to engage in informal income-generating activities, which are more lucrative and allow for more freedom and dignity. The EU Council Recommendation for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation calls on Member States to “combine income support with activation measures” and to “...provide information on the existing legal eligibility requirements to take up benefits”, but nothing further is said about the adequacy, accessibility, or inclusiveness of these benefits.

In Bulgaria, many Roma work informally or in temporary positions and so are ineligible for unemployment benefits, which depend on the length of registered employment and payment of social security contributions. They fall back on minimum income, but complex administrative procedures, stringent conditionality, and discrimination from state employees act as powerful obstacles. Failure to comply with requirements results in penalties and denial of assistance. As such, many Roma don't even try but engage in irregular, informal work instead.

In the Czech Republic, awarding unemployment benefits is generally straightforward, provided that the person meets the legal requirements and the process itself is not discriminatory. Thus, Roma, like any other person who meets the statutory conditions, can easily access them in theory. Insufficient data is available to draw conclusions about how easy it is in practice.

In **Hungary**, unemployment benefits provide a very low amount for a very short duration, and a person needs to be employed, or to pay social contributions separately, or to be registered as a job-seeker. As observed in practice, many Roma families rely instead on income from the informal economy, usually in construction or agriculture. Due to recent Government efforts, civil society estimates that at least half of the Roma employed in the construction industry have been regularised, thus consolidating their social security status.

In **Romania**, requirements include a minimum number of days worked, a discretionary means-test, compulsory registration as a jobseeker, proof of actively looking for a job, and obligation to accept any job offered. The required documents and complicated procedures make it very difficult for disadvantaged Roma (and non-Roma) to access these benefits, which is why take-up is pretty low.

In **Slovakia**, unemployment benefits last for 6 months and are dependent on previous time worked and being registered as a jobseeker. The amount is based on the previous salary. Roma claimants are usually supported in putting together their applications by outreach social workers or community workers, who mainly come from

NGOs but are also sometimes employed through national projects.

In **Spain**, Roma claimants face difficulties with eligibility, as any additional income is grounds for withholding the benefit. Complex information and navigating administrative processes can be daunting for those unfamiliar with formal systems or facing language barriers. Social exclusion and stigma can also discourage Roma from seeking or successfully accessing available benefits.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Roma claimants find it difficult to access information on rights and entitlements (particularly if they don't speak English) and to observe complex rules and requirements, including the Habitual Residence Condition and track record of past employment, which effectively excludes individuals from accessing basic social protection payments. This disproportionately impacts the Roma. 48.1% of respondents who had applied for social protection were unsuccessful. Also, as many as 84% of Roma felt discriminated in attempting to access social protection, and almost two-thirds of Roma who were successful felt discriminated in accessing payments. There is little support for applicants, and often a single bad experience with a state service deters the Roma from applying in future.

"There is services out there and the help is out there, but not everybody's willing to give it to you based on your ethnicity."

Ireland



Antigypsyism in seeking employment

Significant numbers of Roma in all six countries report encountering **widespread anti-gypsyism from placement offices**, whether public or private, and they often see themselves insulted and degraded or refused support. Additionally, Roma jobseekers often see themselves **presented only with low-paid, low-prestige work**, or what is thought of as **'Roma jobs'**. Discriminatory attitudes and antigypsyism are **also rife among employers**, who may **reject Roma candidates**, assign them to placements nobody else wants, or relegate them to **roles that do not involve contact with colleagues or customers**, thus also pandering to the prejudice of the latter two.

The **EU Council Recommendation for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** urges Member States to **"promote equal access to employment** in both the public and the private sector through measures such as positive action and support schemes for employers", as well as to **"combat, reduce and eliminate discrimination** by enhancing awareness-raising concerning non-discriminatory employment and access to employment and activation measures, and to **train employers** in methods for recognising and **tackling discrimination and its root causes**, including antigypsyism and unconscious bias".

In **Bulgaria**, antigypsyism in Public Employment Offices manifests as dismissive and rude behaviour, refusal to assist with documents, delays and even denial of services, imposition of sanctions, and termination of registration for the slightest infractions. Many employers

also display antigypsyist attitudes, which deters Roma from even applying, knowing they will likely be subjected to humiliating and offensive treatment. At best, the Roma are offered low-skilled positions or jobs specifically targeted at Roma.

In many places, Roma with solid education are hired exclusively as health mediators, despite their qualifications for higher positions, because this is perceived as a 'Roma job'. Although health mediators do incredibly important work for both Roma communities and the wider society, it is an unrecognised and underpaid job, and the nature of the work (primarily in poor Roma neighbourhoods with a vulnerable population) contributes to its low prestige. To secure better positions, many Roma are forced to hide their identity.

In the **Czech Republic**, 56% of Roma felt discriminated against when seeking employment in 2021, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency, compared to 28% in 2016. For the long-term unemployed, this figure rose to 64%. The

situation is the same for Roma entrepreneurs, where only a few manage to successfully overcome these prejudices and gain trust, showing a need for more socially responsible public procurement practices.

"I applied for a position in a company and was invited for an interview. When I arrived just an hour later, I was told by the receptionist that all positions had already been filled. When I asked how was that possible, she admitted that the manager had a bad experience with Roma people and explicitly instructed her not to allow them through reception for interviews."

"I was shortlisted and invited for an interview, but when I arrived, it became clear that they were surprised. They asked me if I was indeed Roma, and they avoided eye contact. The next day, I was informed they had chosen someone else. Interestingly, they continued to advertise the same position on their website even a month later."

"I've been registered with the Labour Office for a month now, and during this time, I've contacted about 10 employers. But in each interview, I'm only there for about 3 minutes, and then they tell me the position is no longer available. Once, they even told me openly they didn't want to hire 'Gypsies'."

"I recently inquired about a cleaning job at a shopping centre. The person on the phone asked if I was of Romani origin. I replied yes, and she apologized, saying she couldn't employ Roma people because her boss had ordered it."

Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, 26% of Roma reported discriminatory attitudes on the job market in 2021 according to the Fundamental Rights Agency, up from 13% in 2016. Discrimination is lower in big corporate entities with standardised recruitment procedures but much more prevalent in areas with small businesses where hiring is based more on recommendations, a practice that a priori excludes segregated Roma.

For positions requiring teamwork or direct contact with customers, employers fear that hiring Roma would lead to a backlash from other employees or customers.

In **Romania**, despite the legislation prohibiting differential treatment, both Public Employment Offices and employers routinely treat the Roma in a discriminatory manner, including only offering them low-paid, low-prestige, but hard-working jobs. Even when employers have the best

intentions, they are sometimes required to provide additional proof that the Roma worker they want to hire truly has the needed qualifications, with multiple additional checks (and even requests for unpaid trial service provision) that would not have been required for a non-Roma.

"If a Roma person searches for a job, they will only be offered jobs with low qualifications and low salaries. Employers always assume that the Roma are uneducated, which is discriminatory."

Social worker, Romania

In **Slovakia**, the Roma face antigypsyism in the labour market because of their ethnicity, as well as because of having grown up in a segregated environment, which does not allow for vital social networking. Roma workers face rejection even when they have the required qualifications and expertise, as prejudice runs deeper than credentials.

In **Spain**, some Public Employment Services, as well as private recruitment agencies, exhibit bias against Roma workers, resulting in less favourable treatment when it comes to job placements, career counselling, and training opportunities. Employers' discriminatory attitudes mean fewer job offers or outright rejections, perpetuating cycles of unemployment and underemployment within the community.



Benchmarking with Ireland

Antigypsyism and discrimination are highlighted, with the vast majority (78.9%) of Roma reporting feeling discriminated against in attempting to access employment, particularly those who were easily identifiable as Roma by dress or physical appearance, and particularly women. Some report having to conceal their

Roma identity when seeking employment, and others report losing their jobs when their employers found out that they were Roma. As a result, the Fundamental Rights Agency found, in 2020, that 26% of men and 11% of women thought it was hopeless to look for a job because of their Roma and Traveller background.

“An employer said this directly to one young Roma woman: I need staff and you are my only option, that’s why I’m hiring you.”

“I am a single mom and it’s not easy and then to just go and to say, I’m Roma, I’m from the Roma people, and then you will be like you won’t get the job.”

“When they asked me where I was from I would only say the Czech Republic but I would never say that I’m a Roma. So kind of I was hiding my identity because I was worried what can happen.”

“So, I always wear jeans or put my hair down and made myself look more not Roma, so that I can be treated equally on the interview and not be judged for my ethnicity but rather for me as an individual and the things that I can bring to the job.”

Ireland

Adequate wages and the ethnic pay gap

The consensus in all six countries covered by this report is that the Roma are overrepresented in low-paid jobs.

Centuries of structural antigypsyism and poverty have resulted in a number of **systemic determinants of low pay** among Roma workers, such as unequal access to education leading to **poorer skills** or spatial concentration in underprivileged areas with **poor job opportunities**. Ongoing, widespread discrimination of the Roma on the labour market has two effects – either it locks them in **underemployment and underpayment**. At the same time, their actual potential is ignored, or it prompts them to seek work in **the informal economy, where wages are low**, unreliable, and unaccompanied by social security contributions and entitlements. Finally, there is evidence from most countries that **the ethnic pay gap is real**, meaning that Roma workers are **paid less for equal work** than their non-Roma counterparts, a very worrying and highly insufficiently documented trend. Disappointingly, the **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** does not refer to adequate wages.



In **Bulgaria**, studies indicate that the Roma tend to work primarily in low-paid sectors with high levels of seasonal, temporary positions, such as forestry, agriculture, and construction, due to a combination of low skills as well as discrimination in recruitment.

At the same time, a significant portion of respondents reported receiving lower compensation for the same work compared to their non-Roma colleagues, because of discrimination from the employer.

In the **Czech Republic**, studies carried out 15 years ago confirmed wage disparities related to ethnicity between Roma and not Roma, and the issues likely persist – however, updated research into the matter is needed. This is underpinned by general factors such as untransparent wage setting, gender segregation, and poor work-life balance, as well as Roma-specific factors, such as lower qualifications leading to lower-paid jobs.

In **Hungary**, a much higher proportion of Roma find themselves in low-skilled or unskilled jobs, with corresponding poor levels of wages. Spatial exclusion also impacts wage levels since many Roma live in remote, rural, poor settlements where no better-paid jobs are available. Discrimination in the labour market contributes to the wage marginalisation of Roma workers, and too many find themselves dependent on very low-paid public employment schemes.

In **Romania**, poverty and discrimination of Roma lead to exclusion from the education system, resulting in a lower level of skills and hence a prevalence of poorly paid jobs. But even when they have the skills, discrimination in the labour market still results in the Roma ending up in worse-paid jobs. Antigypsyism on the regular job market also pushes them towards the informal economy, where wages are lower and social security is non-existent.

“Everybody from our community who works for the municipality, in cleaning or maintenance of green areas or other jobs, is only paid minimum wage, no matter what their role or educational background is.”

Romania

In **Slovakia**, field experience shows that many Roma find themselves paid less for the same work because they don't have an employment contract, leaving them open to exploitation. Hard labour on construction or infrastructure projects is almost exclusively done by Roma, a difficult job with low pay that nobody wants.

In **Spain**, the combination of lower educational attainment and discrimination perpetuates a cycle of low wages and limited career advancement for Roma workers. While lower levels of education keep many Roma locked in low-paid jobs, others are also underpaid for the same work compared to non-Roma workers due to antigypsyism.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Widespread situations of withheld wages were reported, where Roma employees were manifestly paid fewer hours than what they had worked or not given the full severance pay due after being dismissed once a racist employer discovered their Roma identity. The Roma did not feel that they were able to obtain redress on their own, and at the same time, they reported lacking the information and resources necessary to access support from qualified services. This is a broader phenomenon than just Roma, as other migrants in the country report the same experience.

Job security and working conditions

Antigypsyism on the labour market – and outside of it – acts as a trap for keeping Roma stuck in low-paid jobs, as confirmed by five of six countries (except Slovakia) indicating a **prevalence of precarious contracts for Roma workers**.

In a blatant display of racism, the Roma tend to be offered low-prestige, physically strenuous, undesirable jobs, and these jobs are also low-paid, with poor employment rights and no employment security.

Additionally, **exploitative employers and ruthless recruitment agencies** take advantage of the fact that many Roma are not sufficiently informed about their rights or cannot easily access employment elsewhere, exposing them to **thoroughly unsuitable and unsafe working conditions** and curtailing their entitlements. The lack of opportunities and constant discrimination and rejection also result in **many Roma seeking income in the informal economy**, where no contracts are enforced. Again, the **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** disappointingly includes no mention of job security, employment rights, or working conditions.

In **Bulgaria**, many Roma engage primarily in temporary or seasonal activities, which entail highly insecure employment relationships, often without a contract, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and unpaid wages. Given their lack of legal literacy and knowledge of their rights, even Roma formal workers are more likely to be taken advantage of and put in hazardous work environments or asked to perform unsuitable tasks without the necessary protective equipment.

In the **Czech Republic**, a third of employed Roma are on a fixed-term employment contract, compared to 5.3% of the general population, which entails high job insecurity. Antigypsyism on the labour market and other barriers mean that the Roma are at greater risk of ending up in exploitative forms of employment and experiencing poor working conditions.

Structure of employment contracts for Roma employees (aged 20-64)

	Type of contract	%
Employees	for a fixed period	34,1
	for an indefinite period	46,1
	do not know*	3,3
	without contract	6,1
Entrepreneurs and self-employed	entrepreneurs and self-employed	10,4
Total		100

Source: Laura Fónadová, Tomáš Katriňák, Miroslava Rákoczyová, Ivana Šimíková, Results of Roma population sample survey - evaluation of indicators, RILSA, 2022

In **Hungary**, the Roma remain overrepresented in public employment schemes and fixed-term employment, leading to frequent job changes, with a more precarious and unpredictable future compared to permanent employment. Employment agencies are a key culprit, as they cast a wide net even in remote areas,

recruiting for unskilled, monotonous,

strenuous jobs and placing workers in bulk on seasonal, fixed-term contracts with poor employment rights.

In **Romania**, most Roma are employed on precarious contracts with poor employment rights and limited access to social security. They are more likely to work in informal, low-paid, and temporary jobs, often lacking associated social security. Roma workers also tend to face poorer

working conditions, including unsafe environments with limited health and safety regulations adherence. These conditions are exacerbated by discriminatory practices, which limit their access to stable, secure employment and decent working standards.

"I tried several times to find a job for my son. He is 18, but they don't want to hire him with a contract; they only want him as a daily worker. But this is no good because he won't have health insurance."

Romania

In **Slovakia**, most Roma have become savvy to the Labour Code and this has contributed to their no longer being taken advantage of through precarious contracts. More research is needed to gauge the situation of Roma contracts. However, some Roma – particularly tradesmen – still work in the informal economy, where no contracts are signed and there are no protections.

In **Spain**, many Roma workers end up on precarious contracts, in informal or temporary positions, with poor employment rights and limited access to social security. Moreover, Roma workers often find themselves in physically demanding and hazardous jobs with minimal oversight or regulation. This is a direct result of systemic discrimination and socio-economic exclusion.

Benchmarking with Ireland

The types of work that are available and accessible to the Roma often have insecure employment arrangements, such as zero-hour contracts, being asked to stay late at short notice, or not knowing until very late the night before if they would be working the next day.

Most of these jobs have poor working conditions in unsafe environments,

with factory rotations and safety protocols not being followed and injured workers being simply replaced with fit ones.

"People with injuries and everything like that, and then they're being dismissed because of those injuries, and simply new people are just brought in and that's it."

"I had a 12-hour shift and for a while I was still working 12 hours and it was hard... those boxes were 45kg and I lifted maybe 400 maybe 500 in a day and I lifted them at a height of 2m."

Ireland

Access to on-the-job training and career progression

The situation of access to training and skills enhancement programmes while already in employment presents a **mixed picture in the reviewed countries**. In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Spain, it is felt that Roma workers are often stuck in **low-skilled, low-pay jobs that don't even offer upskilling or career progression opportunities**. Furthermore, there is a reluctance on behalf of employers to invest in skills in general. Even when they do, **Roma and other disadvantaged workers tend to be overlooked** because of antigypsyism, but perhaps also by design. Conversely, in Hungary and Slovakia, the **Roma do not appear to face barriers** related to discrimination or other factors in accessing on-the-job upskilling programmes, at least not in the case of foreign employers. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member States to “**support on-the-job training, skills development, acquisition and updating of professional qualifications, and second chance education**”, and to “**support the acquisition of digital skills by Roma people**”.

In **Bulgaria**, most Roma have very limited access to professional training and career development, not least because they tend to be employed in jobs that do not entail skills or career progression. Investing in skills enhancement is, in general, not a priority for employers. Unfortunately, the opportunities offered by Public Employment Offices are also not adequate to meet the labour market needs, especially when targeting low-skilled Roma workers.

In the **Czech Republic**, as there are some examples of Roma holding managerial positions in various sectors, it is an indicator that such opportunities sporadically exist. However, field experience indicates that, in most cases, career advancement is hindered by antigypsyism, despite a person's abilities or performance.

“I applied for skills training and requested funding from my employers, like my colleagues, but I was told no financial resources were left. When checking with them, none of them had been denied the funding. I then requested paid study leave, just like my colleagues, but this was also not approved by my supervisor, so I was forced to take vacation days instead.”

Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, there is a difference in attitudes towards Roma workers between international and smaller domestic employers: the smaller the outfit, the more hostile it is to Roma workers. International employers are more open, select workers based on talent, and many

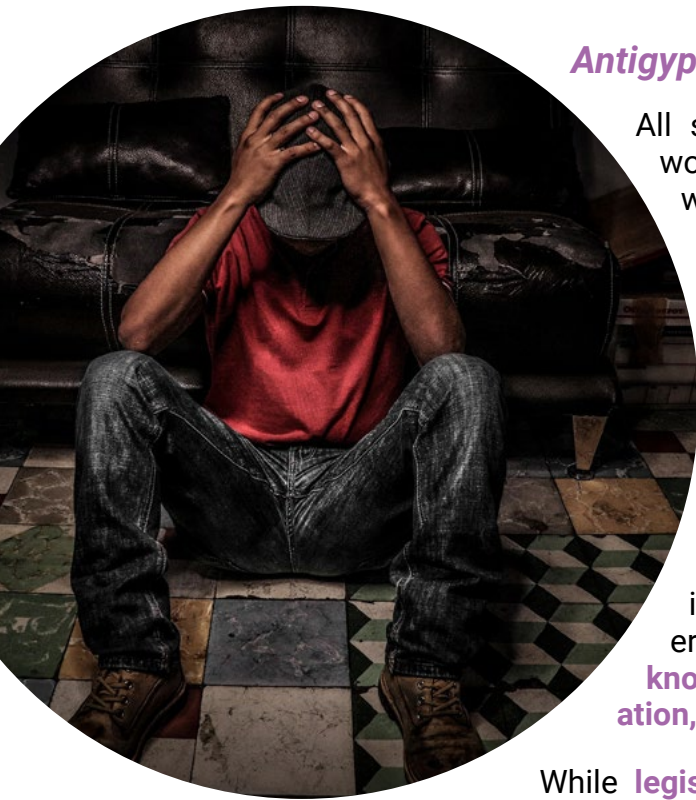
run programmes to help disadvantaged Roma workers acquire the skills they lack. EU-funded projects targeting specifically the skills enhancement of Roma job seekers were implemented in a disastrous way that took no account of people's specific needs and circumstances.

In **Romania**, employers do not see Roma workers as valuable employees worthy of investment. On the other hand, the Roma are not typically employed in sectors that offer professional development opportunities. Some courses are only open to high school graduates, which excludes many Roma who are otherwise qualified for their respective jobs. This lack of career development keeps them in low-wage jobs and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

In **Slovakia**, Roma can easily access training while in employment if the employer is inclusive and open-minded, as is the

case with foreign employers who even send workers for training abroad, whether they are Roma or not. But in the case of national employers, most are structured in such a way that, even when they employ Roma, they do not offer further educational development.

In **Spain**, Roma workers struggle to access on-the-job training and career opportunities due to lower levels of formal education and training, combined with systemic discrimination. They frequently work low-wage, low-skill jobs that offer limited prospects for career growth.



Antigypsyism and discrimination in employment

All six countries except Slovakia report that Roma workers routinely experience discrimination in the workplace from employers, coworkers, clients, partners etc. Manifestations of antigypsyism from employers include, as also chronicled above, instances of unequal pay, poorer employment rights or working conditions, unfair demands or standards, limited access to training and advancement opportunities, and other **curtailing of employment rights**. In addition, many Roma workers regularly endure **harassment, humiliation, insults and derogatory remarks**. And yet, **most Roma workers hesitate to report** these instances of blatant discrimination, given barriers such as a **sense of shame** and hurt, **insufficient knowledge** about recourse procedures, **fear of retaliation**, and disbelief that they would be taken seriously.

While **legislation forbidding discrimination in employment exists in every country**, as well as some targeted efforts to improve diversity and equality in the workplace, these are **deemed insufficient** in all but Slovakia, and much more investment and comprehensive actions are needed to **curb antigypsyism also beyond employment**, in the broader society. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** urges Member States to adopt measures “to **combat, reduce and eliminate discrimination** by enhancing awareness-raising concerning non-discriminatory employment and access to employment and activation measures, and to train employers in methods for **recognising and tackling discrimination and its root causes, including antigypsyism and unconscious bias**.”

In **Bulgaria**, antigypsyism at work is not uncommon – whether from management, coworkers, and customers, leading to harassment and isolation of Roma workers. This is a sensitive and painful topic that few are willing to share or report, given a fear of repercussions, lack of trust in institutions, lack of knowledge of their rights, and lack of legal assistance and support structures. Laws aimed at combating discrimination and promoting workplace diversity are not fully effective.

In the **Czech Republic**, unequal treatment of Roma in the workplace can take the form of lower pay, limited career advancement opportunities, stricter assessments of labour violations, etc. The awareness of the Roma about how to defend themselves against discriminatory actions of employers is relatively low, and they do not trust that their complaint will be adequately investigated.

“My colleague and I were the only Roma in our unit. From the first day, we were scolded, threatened with dismissal several times a week, suspected of theft, told we were doing too little, told we were doing too much. When we met the targets exactly, we were called slackers and shown errors we hadn’t even made. Colleagues who didn’t meet targets received bonuses; we just got hourly wages. I took one day off for medical reasons and the next day I was fired, together with my colleague, for allegedly underperforming.”

“At my previous job, I faced discrimination and, under pressure, I decided to resign, even though I had worked there for a year, I had a contract for an indefinite period, and I enjoyed my job in retail. I am hesitant to be specific because I don’t want to relive the experience or expose myself to further public humiliation by the manager, who continually made offensive allusions to my Roma origin.”

Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, the smaller a workplace is, the likelier it is to discriminate against Roma. Big multinationals have diversity policies that they have implemented for years with minority staff, and they even pro-actively offer support to integrate Roma workers better. However, smaller, Hungarian-based employers avoid working with Roma staff altogether. Few Roma victims of discrimination seek legal redress, due to a lack of knowledge as well as a lack of trust in the justice system. Anti-discrimination legislation has little preventive effect and low visibility.

In **Romania**, Roma individuals face antigypsyism and discrimination in employment at all levels. Employers pay them lower wages or offer fewer benefits restricting their career growth. Discrimination from colleagues and clients leads to hostile working environments, where Roma workers are harassed, excluded from social interactions, or assigned menial tasks to reinforce their segregation. Efforts to promote diversity in Romanian workplaces are limited, and employment equality legislation is not consistently enforced.



In **Slovakia**, there is a high incidence of antigypsyism and open racism in recruitment. However, the occurrence of antigypsyism in the workplace is infrequent. Once a Roma person has been in employment and has been working for a long time, they are treated the same as their colleagues. Anti-discrimination legislation is robust, and workers are aware of recourse channels.

In **Spain**, antigypsyism in the workplace can include overt bias, being assigned lower-status tasks, receiving lower pay for equivalent work, and being excluded from training and promotion opportunities. The awareness of available recourse among Roma is often limited, preventing them from seeking redress. While there are some initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive work environments, they are generally insufficient, and anti-bias training is badly needed.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Many Roma interviewed also described how they faced racism in the workplace, including being targeted at work, treated differently to other employees, being at the bottom of the power hierarchy, and losing jobs when it was learned that they were Roma. Roma women are described as experiencing more direct discrimination than men, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions targeting intersectional discrimination, such as both racism and sexism. Support workers reported a fear in the community to speak up or try to address these issues, as the Roma feared losing work.

One young woman described racism from midline managers, how she and other Roma were treated worse than other staff, not rotated as they should be on the factory line, while other staff received better treatment. She described her lack of power in the situation to respond or address this. She described how she ultimately lost her job.

Ireland

Roma representation in trade union structures

In most countries (with the exception of Slovakia), while there is a **lack of available data on Roma representation** within trade union membership, evidence from the ground indicates that **many Roma work in sectors that are not unionised**.

As a result, Roma-specific issues, such as poor working conditions, lack of job security, and discrimination, are often overlooked in collective bargaining processes.

The case is made for more outreach by trade unions towards the most **vulnerable workers**, making information available in minority languages and actively seeking their involvement. Unfortunately, the **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** does **not refer to trade unions** or to collective bargaining as a key means to improve the situation of Roma in the labour market.

In **Bulgaria**, many Roma work in the informal economy, so they are not covered. However, for those regularly employed, representation is low, which means that collective bargaining does not flag up the

issues that Roma workers face. While national trade unions acknowledge the need for better integration and representation of Roma, little is done to improve this situation.

Recently, a Roma woman has taken a very active position in one of the country's trade unions and has gained media recognition for her advocacy of workers' rights. Unfortunately, neither she nor the union as a whole address the specific problems of working Roma.

Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, improved participation in trade unions would be very beneficial for combatting and denouncing discrimination and inequalities against Roma in the workplace to ensure that their voices are heard and that the specific issues they face are addressed. It would also allow them to be involved in decision-making processes, fostering a greater sense of empowerment and belonging.



In **Hungary**, the trade union movement lost strength and membership after the change in the political regime. Within the already weak trade unions, the Roma play almost

no role, and trade union membership is rare among them. Also, many Roma are working in the informal economy, where trade union membership is not an option.

According to one Roma worker turned national politician, getting Roma into a trade union is very difficult because they do not understand its importance and cannot afford the membership fee. Also, trade unions do not treat the situation of Roma in the labour market as a priority.

Hungary

In **Romania**, Roma workers are poorly represented in trade union structures, which limits their ability to advocate for their specific labour rights and concerns, mainly

as most are employed in informal or precarious jobs where union membership is less common. National trade unions rarely address Roma-specific issues directly.

“From my knowledge, we address discrimination in general, and so far, we have not had any Roma representative in my trade union.”

Trade unionist, Romania

In **Slovakia**, the Confederation of Trade Unions represents everyone, regardless of ethnic minority, and Roma workers are part of trade unions in workplaces.

In **Spain**, available evidence suggests that Roma are generally underrepresented in these organisations, which often means that Roma-specific issues are ignored or inadequately addressed. There is a lack of tailored advocacy and support for issues specifically affecting Roma workers.



Atypical and informal employment

Rejected on the open labour market, the Roma in the six countries find themselves pushed into alternative income-generating activities to make ends meet.

Historically, the Roma have engaged in **traditional crafts and trading**, but a lack of demand in the modern market has **rendered them obsolete**. During the summer months, many Roma take advantage of **seasonal opportunities** in agriculture, forestry, construction, or tourism. Still, this work is often unregulated and **lacks formal contracts**, exposing them to exploitation, insecurity, and lower pay. Much remains to be done to **address the situation of informal Roma workers**, and most **Roma entrepreneurs still face countless barriers** in the quest to legitimise their income-generating activities. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** does not include provisions regarding traditional crafts or the fight against undeclared work but contains one call to Member States to adopt measures to “promote genuinely equal access to self-employment.”

In **Bulgaria**, the Roma who are self-employed in traditional crafts or seasonal and informal jobs often work under poor conditions, without social protection and income security. Blacksmithing, basket weaving, and tinning are on the verge of extinction, given a lack of market demand for these products. Self-employed Roma frequently encounter difficulties in accessing credit and financing, which limits their business development opportunities.

In the **Czech Republic**, due to historical circumstances, traditional crafts disappeared a long time ago. Only Roma musicians persist. In the seasonal and informal economy, the Czech Roma mainly work in construction (men) and cleaning (women).





In **Hungary**, crafts like basket weaving, rug making, and woodcarving are disappearing, given a lack of demand, unless they adapt to current market needs (e.g. trading in cars rather than horses). Public policy efforts to preserve them were unsuccessful, and they only reinforced stereotypes about the Roma living in a backward, pre-industrial world. Many Roma work in the construction sector, where recent developments meant improvements to their working conditions.

In **Romania**, many Roma are 'employed' as daily workers, which is a form of legal work but one that allows the employer to not pay social security contributions and health insurance. Roma pursuing traditional crafts or freelance artistic work are formally registering as self-employed less and less, given a rigid and unsupportive system in terms of taxes and bureaucracy.

In **Slovakia**, some of the Roma are forced to register as self-employed because the employer refuses to accept the higher costs of having them as regular employees. This transfers all responsibility for social security contributions, health insurance, and taxes to the worker, a daunting

and highly disadvantageous proposition for the Roma and in general. The concept of traditional crafts is often misunderstood and associated with negative stereotypes.

In **Spain**, Roma artisans are active in hand-made jewellery, textiles, and woodwork, while others are involved in street vending or casual labour, which provide flexibility but offer no protection, security, or access to benefits and pensions. Roma workers take on seasonal jobs, such as agricultural work during harvest periods. Some continue to engage in temporary or itinerant work opportunities, like participating in markets or fairs.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Every Roma interviewee expressed a strong desire to work and commitment to work, and the majority had at least one previous experience of working / being self-employed, across a number of employment sectors, wherever they could find opportunities. They adapted to opportunities as they arose or were needed, with one young male participant describing having worked as a forklift driver, a painter decorator, and a barber at different times.

EU Roma mobile workers

In all six countries reviewed in this report, **many Roma of working age have pursued employment opportunities abroad**, not least in a bid to escape poverty and the lack of working prospects back home. However, the **treatment and level of integration of Roma workers** in foreign labour markets was not the same in all countries. While Slovak and Czech Roma report **lack of discrimination and better quality of work** and employment abroad, Roma workers from the remaining 4 countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Spain) suffer continued **antigypsyism** and isolation (even segregation), exploitation, **low or lack of pay**, intolerable working conditions, **lack of social security entitlements** and employment rights, and a wide array of barriers to accessing support, including linguistic and cultural.

The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** includes multiple references to **EU mobile Roma** and urges Member States to enact measures to:

- “support EU mobile Roma, including by providing **language training, quality early childhood education and care, schooling, public employment services, social workers, mediators**, etc.
- combine income support with activation measures to **promote labour market participation** and with employment support, particularly for Roma women and EU mobile Roma and to provide information on the existing **legal eligibility requirements to take up benefits** accompanied by activation and **enabling services**;
- promote and facilitate access of vulnerable Roma populations, such as [...] EU mobile Roma, Roma who are third country nationals, and stateless Roma, to **quality health care**;
- **fight multiple and structural discrimination** against Roma and, in particular, against [...] stateless Roma and EU mobile Roma;
- encourage the establishment of, and active participation in, appropriate forms of **transnational cooperation**, [... which] could include, for example, cooperation on questions related to **educational access, experience and outcomes among Roma children, and municipality-level needs and challenges** [... and] **the participation of Roma themselves.**”

In **Bulgaria**, many Roma originally accepted low-skilled and unattractive jobs abroad, often seasonally and informally, which made them victims of exploitation and poor working conditions, as well as improper practices from intermediaries and employers, including withholding

documents and forced labour. In recent years, many of them have settled permanently in the host countries and their situation has improved. However, they still face cultural and linguistic barriers, leading to isolation and even the emergence of 'ghettos' in the receiving countries.

Despite significant changes in recent years, many Roma families share stories of working in agriculture or construction in countries like Germany, Italy, and Spain. They describe being forced to work under poor conditions without adequate pay and social protection. Some even recount cases of fraud by intermediaries who took money to arrange jobs but then failed to provide the promised conditions.

Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, many Roma living close to the border are known to take advantage of employment opportunities in Austria and Germany, while various sources estimate that at least 10,000 Roma from the Czech Republic live and work in the United Kingdom. The Roma working abroad do not face the same level of discrimination from foreign employers, and the work usually is better paid.

In **Hungary**, there is almost no data available on the number and proportion of Roma workers abroad. Still, various sources highlight that a significant proportion of Roma – mainly men, long-term unemployed, coming from segregated areas, with low levels of education and no language skills – work abroad without their families, as quasi guest workers, in the hope of better life at home. They typically

travel to Germany and the Netherlands to work in sectors such as agriculture, construction, food, and catering, frequently in unacceptable working conditions and without receiving the promised salary.

In **Romania**, many Roma go to Spain, Germany, Italy, Austria, France, or the UK for seasonal or permanent work. They often face exploitative conditions, low wages, and very long daily working hours, paired with poor living conditions and no legal status or access to social services. This is due to insufficient labour control and enforcement, a lack of information, and poor knowledge of local language and legislation. They often return home after months of hard labour without any money or having had to spend it all on food and travel.

"There was a big group of Roma from our community who went to France to harvest the grapes and the farmer did not pay them... Nobody does anything about it, even if we complain. This is why we prefer not to go abroad for work."

Romania

In **Slovakia**, Roma who go abroad for work, whether seasonally or permanently, are much more satisfied with their quality of life abroad because they do not feel discriminated against, can earn higher incomes, have more flexibility in choosing their field of work, receive free training, and are given opportunities to progress at work. While a few had initially experienced short-term placements or unfavourable working conditions, they subsequently found better jobs.

In **Spain**, Roma workers abroad still face exploitation in informal and low-skilled jobs, difficulties in accessing healthcare and social security entitlements, discrimination and social exclusion in the new communities, as well as language and cultural differences that impede their access to support services. Spain is also

a receiving country for Roma workers from abroad, who face very similar challenges: antigypsyism, precarious and unfair working conditions, bureaucratic and linguistic barriers in accessing rights, resources, and services.

Benchmarking with Ireland

The Roma who have left their country of birth to come to Ireland did so in a bid to escape endemic racism and discrimination in their home countries, in what concerns both employment as well as overall quality of life and better educational opportunities for their children. Their plight has been chronicled in the previous sections. Research shows some improvements for second-generation Roma, who were born or raised in Ireland, however, this wasn't across the board.

Job creation and the social economy

While most countries report that their Governments have some sort of **public job creation scheme in place**, including some aimed specifically at Roma workers, those tend to **fall short of the mark** for a variety of reasons ranging from **lack of quality, sustainability**, or prospects to **worsening segregation and exclusion** of Roma workers. There is consensus in all six countries that **social economy, particularly work integration social enterprises (WISEs), can play a key role** in supporting Roma employment by providing **quality jobs and opportunities for training**, as well as by fostering a new generation of **Roma social entrepreneurs**.

However, much more needs to be done in all countries to support the development of social economy in general and as a tool for Roma inclusion.

The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** calls on Member States to enact measures to “promote genuinely **equal access to self-employment and entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship**, through targeted support” and “**support labour market mobility**, particularly for those living in rural and segregated areas with limited job opportunities”.

In **Bulgaria**, there is a scheme of public jobs in cleaning and maintenance that provide employment for six months to a year for minimum wage – but they are just a temporary, insecure solution for the Roma. There is little state support for social enterprises, which are often project-based and

then disappear. Those that do exist target mainly people with disabilities rather than the Roma. There are also no specific programmes to support Roma entrepreneurs, much less social entrepreneurs.

The municipality created a social enterprise where several women, including Roma women, were trained to process various natural materials and create different items and souvenirs, sold at local markets, providing the women with income and sustainable jobs. This and other examples demonstrate the potential of the social economy to offer sustainable employment and integration solutions for Roma. However, more adequate support from the state is necessary.

Rakovski, Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, there are no public job creation initiatives that would benefit the Roma. Employer subsidies are unreliable, as it is impossible to quantify how many new jobs go to the Roma or how many are quality jobs. Social enterprises are very beneficial as they often provide stable employment and skills development to Roma workers while also helping to dismantle stereotypes. Roma-led social enterprises, however, still face discrimination when competing for contracts or funding. Currently, a draft law is being discussed that could enhance support for social enterprises and contribute to the development of the social economy.



In **Hungary**, while subsidies are available to employers for hiring hard-to-reach workers, results are unknown without segregated data. The Roma are overrepresented in the national public employment scheme, which offers unskilled local jobs

paid at 50% of minimum wage, but is the only option in many remote areas. Social economy has a low profile despite its great potential, and successful initiatives set up by civil society have not proven to be sustainable.

Three examples of social enterprises:

- In Gyulaj (Tolna County), a project run by the Maltese Charity employed local Roma women to grow and pickle vegetables which were then sold in supermarkets;

- In Bag (Pest County), an initiative by the Bagázs Civil Association of sorting and reselling second-hand clothes, complemented by sewing, provided income to several Roma women;

- In Szűcs (Heves County), a worker-owned bakery was set up by Roma women with the support of Autonomia Foundation and provided baked goods to Budapest nightclubs.

These were only possible because of the involvement and efforts of civil society organisations, and they came to an end when projects ended their cycles, highlighting the need for systemic support for such local social economy initiatives.

Hungary



In **Romania**, there are no quality job creation initiatives that are accessible to Roma, conversely, private-sector employers prefer recruiting foreign workers who are already trained. Most jobs available to the Roma are low-paid and low-skilled. There were only some NGO initiatives

aimed at supporting Roma local employment, but they were short-lived. While some Government programmes aimed at fostering social economy, some with European funding, continued, comprehensive follow-up support to social enterprises is missing.

In 2024, an initiative to develop social economy in rural and urban areas was launched by the Government. However, those applying for grants to create social enterprises needed to have at least high school education completed, which excluded most Roma in the country. One of the rules of this programme foresees the employment of disadvantaged communities such as the Roma, but it remains to be seen how many of these enterprises will actually employ Roma workers.

Romania

In **Slovakia**, creating local jobs for the Roma deepens existing segregation. Over the years, a parallel system of jobs for the Roma has emerged, with the support of EU funds, but this system has a lock-in effect: no training opportunities, no contact with the outside world or mainstream labour

market, and no possibility to move outside the segregated community. Some social enterprises provide Roma and other disadvantaged workers with a place to acquire skills and gain professional experience, but not enough of them do so.

Wasco is a positive example of a social enterprise supporting Roma inclusion. It is a laundry service where several disadvantaged groups work together - Roma, single mothers, people released from prison, people with disabilities, etc. It is a Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) which is also Roma-led.

Valaská, Slovakia



In **Spain**, public and private initiatives aimed at increasing employment opportunities for Roma are limited and do not sufficiently address community needs stemming from discrimination, segregation, poverty, and social exclusion. The social economy, including work integration social enterprises, offers tailored support, creates inclusive workplaces, and helps Roma employees develop skills and gain stable employment. They also provide a platform for Roma social entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses that benefit their communities.

Benchmarking with Ireland

The recently-adopted *Pathways to Work* initiative foresees a number of potentially useful commitments, such as reserving places on public employment programmes for people from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds, implementing the Public Appointments Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023, including raising awareness of public sector employment opportunities among these individuals or considering the proposal to make the higher level of the JobsPlus

subsidy available to all employers who recruit an unemployed person of Traveller or Roma ethnicity. There are examples of some positive measures in relation to State internships for Travellers and Roma, a scheme announced in October 2022 which offers 12-month paid internship contracts in clerical and executive officer roles. However, very few of these programmes have resulted in long-term employment opportunities. There are also a number of Roma working within civil society organisations, which is positive but this requires further investment and support to ensure sustainability going into the future.

Employment 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 and sustainable employment**”, with three sub-targets: to **cut the employment gap** by at least half, to **cut the gender employment gap** for Roma by at least half, and to **cut the gap in NEET rate** by at least half, all by 2030. Through the 2019 **Declaration on Roma integration in the EU enlargement process**, Western Balkan countries are equally committed to implementing the Strategy, including **improving Roma access to employment**. 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 sustainable employment** through many 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 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 employment measures for Roma. While a number of them reported improved or additional measures, including regarding active labour market support,

the Commission still deems that “progress is slow, and more efforts are needed. Measures remain often limited to projects rather than systemic changes.”

The Commission further calls on Member States to, once again, “**increase the level of ambition** in relation to the integration of Roma in the labour market, **fully implement initiatives** to activate underrepresented groups and persons in vulnerable situations, including Roma”.

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 employment**. The [synthesis of the assessment reports](#) identifies the following **missing dimensions from National Roma Strategic Frameworks concerning employment**:

poor access to, or ineffectiveness of, Public Employment Services; discrimination by employers; disincentives to employment (such as indebtedness, low income from work compared to social income); lack of employment support; and low-level digital competences among adults.

These findings are **echoed by the submissions of the national researchers** in the countries within the scope of the present report. While **Roma access to employment and the labour market is included as an objective** in the National Roma Strategic Frameworks of the six main countries reviewed in this report, an assessment of the **quality and suitability** of the proposed measures reveals a **mixed picture**. While the goals which are included are deemed adequate, researchers feel that several **objectives are too vague**, sometimes concrete **measures are lacking or are insufficient**, there are doubts about the **political will of local authorities** as well as **reduced national funding** to implement the proposals, and a number of critical areas are **not addressed at all**. There are also reports of poor monitoring and a lack of setting of milestones and indicators.

In **Bulgaria**, the current National Roma Strategic Framework essentially repeats the operational goals of the previous strategy. While there are some positive measures concerning women, NEET youth, and older adults, these are limited in scope and resources and not aligned with actual needs, and they often fail to reach the most vulnerable groups within Roma communities. There are no policy proposals for key issues such as fighting discrimination, improving working conditions, supporting access to vocational training, preventing local and cross-border exploitation, combating undeclared work in agriculture, forestry, and construction, and supporting long-term professional development. Effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the results are also lacking.

In the **Czech Republic**, out of the 13 measures of the National Roma Strategic Framework dedicated to supporting Roma employment, 5 were not implemented, 5 were partly implemented, and 3 were implemented. While the measures are not bad, delivery can certainly be improved. It is positive that antigypsyism and social exclusion are explicitly mentioned in the strategy, including concerning the labour market.

In **Hungary**, the National Roma Strategic Framework includes a thorough and accurate analysis of the situation of disadvantaged Roma on the Hungarian labour market. However, there are no associated specific measures to improve the situation; there are just general objectives. While efforts reach a wide number of target groups, they are not fit for purpose and only make a marginal difference on the ground. Effectiveness is also limited by the fact that beneficiaries can only re-enter a support project after a certain period of time, leading to fragmented provision.

In **Romania**, the National Roma Strategic Framework features quite comprehensive measures aimed at improving the labour market participation of Roma communities, highlighting issues such as low levels of skills, paying specific attention to Roma youth and Roma women, and leveraging EU funds for job placements and trainings. It also shows a good understanding of the root causes of labour market exclusion and the gender dimension. However, while the strategy is ambitious, its implementation has been historically weak and limited, given over-reliance on EU funds and a lack of concrete implementation milestones. Consequently, the situation on the ground stays the same.

In **Slovakia**, while measures to increase the employment rate of Roma from marginalised communities are included in the National Roma Strategic Framework, many of them are not realistic, as they do not take into account issues such as poverty and marginalisation or lack of basic literacy and numerical skills, acting as powerful barriers to beneficiaries taking up the support offered. There are some positive measures to support social entrepreneurship, improve digital skills, and implement the Youth Guarantee also for Roma. However, initiatives supporting job mobility are missing, while labour migration within the country is common for Roma from marginalised communities.

In **Spain**, while the National Roma Strategic Framework is a valuable tool for advancing Roma access to employment, it requires significant adjustments to be fully effective. The absence of up-to-date and detailed statistics hinders effective intervention and limits the ability to measure real impact. It is also crucial to embed an intersectional and interdepartmental perspective to ensure virtuous circles of integrated support, with an increased role for public administrations. The Framework must also balance positive action measures that address the particular needs of the Roma with the overall objectives of social inclusion, avoiding further Roma segregation.





CONCLUSIONS

In the six countries reviewed in this report, as well as in Ireland,

the Roma find themselves inactive, unemployed, or underemployed due to a combination of low skills, missing social networks, lack of job opportunities where they live, limited transport links to where the jobs are, a background of poverty and social exclusion (including poor health and substandard housing), as well as pervasive antigypsyism in recruitment.

And yet, Roma jobseekers **cannot access much-needed support**, as they are rarely eligible for **unemployment benefits**, active labour market policies are **not tailored to their specific needs**, and Public Employment Services lack the training and the capacity to provide **integrated, person-centred pathways**.

Desperate to ensure survival for their families, **the Roma end up accepting any job**, including **precarious contracts** with **poor pay** and **unsafe working conditions**, in sectors involving **hard labour** and **no opportunities for progress**, including in the **informal economy**. **Antigypsyism in the workplace** further leads to Roma workers receiving unequal treatment while their **access to recourse and justice remains low**. More and better-targeted interventions and **pro-active support and outreach are needed**, as well as the necessary **political will**, to make a fundamental change in Roma access to decent and sustainable employment.

In all countries, **access to decent and sustainable employment is deemed a cornerstone for Roma inclusion** by the participating researchers. Supporting the Roma into quality and sustainable employment contributes to **combating Roma poverty and social exclusion**, ensures **financial stability** and **access to social security**, supports **skills development**, promotes **social participation**, and enhances a sense of **dignity and self-worth**.

The benefits are not limited to Roma communities, as having more **diverse labour forces with minority workers**, including Roma, helps to **overcome prejudices** and discrimination, promotes **social justice and equality**, supports **economic growth**, and fosters broader community development and **social cohesion**.



NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

BULGARIA



Enhance the effectiveness of employment measures:

- Expanding scope and resources: Increase the coverage and resources of employment programmes aimed explicitly at Roma communities.
- Targeted professional training: Introduce initiatives for professional training and skill development aligned with local labour market needs.
- Social security access: Ensure better access to the social security system and enforcement of labour rights for Roma workers.



Improving access to the labour market:

- *Sustainable employment opportunities*: Create more opportunities for sustainable employment through public sector jobs and social enterprises.
- *Encouraging social entrepreneurship*: Promote social entrepreneurship by providing funding and consultations for Roma interested in becoming social entrepreneurs.
- *Support for social enterprises*: Assist in creating and developing social enterprises that offer labour integration opportunities for Roma.



Combating discrimination and antigypsyism:

- *Preventive work*: Conduct preventive work with employers and employees to fight discrimination and promote workplace diversity.
- *Strengthening legislation*: Enhance legislation and mechanisms to protect the rights of Roma.



Support for Roma working abroad:

- *Legal assistance and consultations:* Provide legal assistance and consultations for Roma working abroad to protect their rights and interests.
- *International partnerships:* Establish international partnerships to combat labour exploitation and abuses.



Monitoring and evaluation of measures:

- *Effective monitoring mechanisms:* Implement effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the results of employment measures.
- *Data collection and analysis:* Regularly collect adequate and reliable data on implementing measures, analyse results, and plan improvements for policies and programmes.

CZECH REPUBLIC



Support measures in line with the Race Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive, both through legislative changes and funding initiatives to end structural discrimination in access to employment and in the workplace.



Establish legislative conditions that enable swift and effective defence against discriminatory actions by employers. Provide systematic and long-term training on anti-discrimination practices for public administration, trade unions, and employers.



Ensure individualised approaches based on Active Inclusion strategies for Roma jobseekers, utilizing additional support services, and emphasizing the development of motivation and responsibility among Roma job seekers.



Prevent discrimination against small Roma social enterprises in the procurement for state public contracts.



Target funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) to support effective approaches to working with Roma job seekers, focusing on comprehensive active inclusion strategies, supporting initial work experiences, involvement in trade union activities, or establishing trade union organisations.



Direct ESF funds towards supporting and developing the social economy and the creation of new social enterprises, particularly those oriented towards employing individuals who are long-term socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.



Facilitate active dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including public administration, trade unions, Roma and pro-Roma organisations, and employers, to foster dialogue and cooperation aimed at reducing discrimination and transforming workplaces to embrace diversity as a positive change and contribution.

HUNGARY



Better data collection on Roma workers and job seekers.

Roma workers are portrayed in the public discourse as „hidden labour market reserve“, and a definition of this term could help to determine future development programmes.



Support mentoring at the workplace and external support for workers,

as several employers reported very high fluctuation in low-skilled jobs, partly due to difficult working conditions and partly due to a lack of adaptability of employers and workers.



Develop Public Employment Services that are fit for purpose,

as many active labour market policies are only available on a project-basis, whereas much more flexible and tailor-made support should be provided, with the involvement of employers and civil society.



Provide employment opportunities to regions lagging behind,

reducing geographical inequality through significant investments in infrastructure development and quality social services (welfare services, public education, basic health care).



Support mobility programmes for workers (and their families)

who cannot find employment locally but who have competitive skills, replacing 'commuting on a weekly basis'.



Ensure that cases of discrimination are detected as widely as possible,

through simplifying the procedures involved and providing victims with access to free legal aid.

ROMANIA



Capacitate Public Employment Services

to be able to work and promote Roma inclusion and participation on the labour market.



Improve enforcement mechanisms to combat workplace discrimination,

ensuring that Roma workers have equal access to jobs and career progression opportunities.



Create tailored training programmes accessible to low-educated Roma individuals,

enabling them to develop skills for higher-paying, stable jobs.



Ensure that the National Roma Framework 2022-2027 employment measures are implemented effectively

with clear milestones and sufficient resources.



Encourage private and public sector employers to adopt diversity policies

that specifically target the inclusion of Roma workers.



Promote initiatives that foster social entrepreneurship among Roma communities,

providing them with the tools and resources to create sustainable businesses.



Break the cycle of poverty and exclusion

– the comprehensive employment challenges faced by the Roma in Romania call for more focused, sustained, and adequately resourced interventions.

SLOVAKIA



Reduce antigypsyism

by breaking down stereotypes among employers and educating them about structural disadvantages.



Mediate encounters between Roma jobseekers and employers,

as a way of overcoming the barrier of segregation as they get to know Roma directly, not just from hearsay.



Raise awareness of violations of anti-discrimination law in access to employment.



Ensure that projects creating jobs for the Roma are stepping stones, providing support with education and skills acquisition with a view to fostering integration in the open labour market.

SPAIN



→ **Implement targeted training and skills development programmes** tailored to the needs of the Roma community.



→ **Provide support and resources for entrepreneurship,** including mentorship, funding opportunities, and business development training.



→ **Develop and enforce stronger anti-discrimination policies** to ensure fair treatment in the workplace.



→ **Increase access to legal support and advocacy services for Roma workers** facing exploitation and unfair practices.



→ **Decrease the number of Roma youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)** by creating targeted outreach and support programmes for Roma youth aged 16-30 to encourage educational and vocational engagement, and by offering scholarships, internships, and apprenticeships specifically designed for Roma youth.



Enhance empowerment, participation, and activation of Roma women

in the labour market, develop initiatives to support Roma women in accessing job opportunities, leadership roles, and professional development, and address barriers to employment for Roma women, including childcare support and flexible working arrangements.



Value and enhance the skills of Roma engaged in street vending,

provide training and resources to improve their business practices and market reach, facilitating the transition from informal street vending to formal business operations, offering support in areas such as legal registration, financial management, and market access.



Foster collaborations between local governments, businesses, and Roma

to create tailored employment and training programmes.



Launch public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes

and raise awareness about the contributions and potential of the Roma community.



Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and measure the impact

of employment initiatives on the Roma population.



Involve Roma representatives in policy-making processes

to ensure that employment policies and programmes are responsive to their needs and realities.

ADDITIONAL NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ireland

Policy recommendations

- **Develop a comprehensive Traveller and Roma Employment, Training and Enterprise Plan** with clear targets, indicators, timelines, and allocated resources; in collaboration with Traveller organisations and organisations working with Roma as committed to in Pathways to Work 2021-2025 and Programme for Government 2020.
- **Integrate and align the actions of the upcoming Traveller and Roma Employment, Training and Enterprise Plan with the implementation of employment actions** on the next iteration of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.
- **Implement ethnic equality monitoring (in line with human rights standards) across all relevant state departments** (including Department of Social Protection, and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment), considering some of the additional regulatory barriers experienced by Roma and to equality-proof mainstream employment policy.
- **Review the application of legislation and policy which disproportionately impact Roma** access to basic social protections and employment supports, such as the Habitual Residence Condition and the PPS application process.
- **Introduce clearly mapped access to employment services, social protection and other basic supports for Roma** with specific supports to navigate the system, language barriers, and the digital divide.
- **Introduce specific targets and targeted programmes to increase and improve participation and outcomes for Roma in Further Education and Training**, including in apprenticeship programmes.
- **Review the Community Employment Scheme to facilitate better access and outcomes for Roma**, including progressive pathways from the scheme.

Recommendations for targeted supports/ direct work with Roma

- **Ensure multi-annual and sustainable funding for Roma projects** for meaningful engagement and better outcomes for Roma, including the continuation and expansion of DCEDIY Roma Employment Funding.
- **Support interagency/collaborative approaches between State agencies and Roma projects** for improved service delivery and employment supports at the local level.
- **Develop targeted education programmes for Roma on employment rights** (focusing on reporting mechanisms, supporting bodies, Equality legislation and Public Sector Duty).
- **Introduce specific measures for Roma women** that incorporate flexibility in employment and childcare supports at a local level.
- **An intersectional approach is needed to link community development work (in conjunction with organisations working with Roma) with supports for employment.** This will strengthen this work at a local level and help to create the conditions to support local employment initiatives/social enterprise schemes. Roma are a named target group in SICAP.

Workplace recommendations

- **Develop clear mechanisms to address racism in work** (anti-racism awareness, equality codes of practice), and ensure employers and State agencies are aware of their obligations.
- **Workplace Relation Inspectorate to conduct targeted inspections of certain sectors**, for example, sectors that feature in the research such as - waste management, agency work, factories, and fruit farms.
- **Employment supports and services to include information on worker's rights**, and complaints mechanisms (such as Work Relations Commission, Trade Unions, workers associations) and improve access to these mechanisms for Roma with targeted information and language supports.

