REPORT 2026

ROMA CHILD POVERTY

AND THE PREVENTION OF **FAMILY SEPARATION**

In Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Spain





ERGO NETWORK

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 2026. Members in Bulgaria (*Integro Association*), Czechia (*Life Together*), Hungary (*Autonómia Foundation*), Romania (*Sastipen - Roma Center for Health Policies),* Slovakia (*Roma Advocacy and Research Centre*), and Spain (*Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia*) have provided direct evidence through in-depth national case studies.

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

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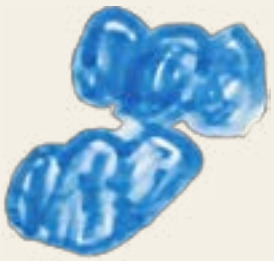
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"When parents provide care, affection, and protection, but they lack adequate income, good housing, or administrative support, the correct public response should be family support, not removal."

ROMA CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVIST, SPAIN



KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all six countries, Roma communities are markedly younger than majority populations, and most Roma children face staggering levels of poverty and deprivation.

Comprehensive investment in combatting Roma child poverty is urgently needed, as a clear policy priority with measurable targets and adequate budgets, combining adequate income support with access to services, backed by disaggregated data and monitoring.

Poverty, segregation, and discrimination severely impair Roma children's access to adequate housing and quality healthcare, education, and other essential services.

Governments must guarantee effective access through integrated, community-based provision where Roma children live, making full use of Roma health, education, and community mediators and ensuring that staff have received appropriate cultural training.

Roma parents face labour market exclusion, inadequate social protection, care responsibilities, and racism, while support is insufficient.

There are no poor children in rich families. Providing wrap-around family support should include pathway approaches towards quality employment, adequate income support, access to quality services, counselling and mediation tailored to families' actual needs.

Antigypsyism shapes Roma children's lives from an early age and at every stage, restricting their access to rights, services, and opportunities.

Intersectional discrimination, including racism and antigypsyism, must be tackled as a structural and cross-cutting obstacle to Roma children's wellbeing, through legislation, desegregation measures, mandatory anti-bias training, and effective remedies.

Too often, poverty and marginalisation are interpreted as parental failure, exposing Roma families to unnecessary separation.

Material conditions should never be grounds for child removal, and families at risk must receive timely, coordinated income and housing support, alongside healthcare and childcare, prioritising the preservation or restoration of the family unit.

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

Policymakers and all actors working with children and families must cooperate closely with Roma stakeholders and their civil society representatives, to ensure evidence-based solutions, support disaggregated data collection, and bridge cultural gaps.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

While the European discourse increasingly frames children primarily as 'talent' and future 'human capital', Roma children across Europe remain among the most marginalised groups, facing persistent poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. Recent data from the Fundamental Rights Agency point to an estimated 77% of Roma children at risk of poverty in the European Union. Material deprivation and social exclusion intersect with pervasive structural and institutional antigypsyism, which continues to shape access to housing, healthcare, education, and social protection. Racialised families such as Roma families, living in extreme poverty, subpar living conditions, overcrowded housing, or informal settlements are often subjected to heightened surveillance by authorities, increasing the risk that poverty is interpreted as neglect, and leading to the disproportionate separation of Roma children from their families.

The **EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020 – 2030** includes three sub-targets directly relevant to Roma children: to *cut the poverty gap between Roma children and other children by at least half*; to *cut the gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half*; and to *cut by at least half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools*. Moreover, it clearly states that National Roma Frameworks should set out "...targets and measures for specific groups [such as] Roma children". The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** also includes multiple references to Roma children, mainstreamed throughout the document and consistently highlighted across all horizontal objectives.

Finally, the **European Child Guarantee**, adopted in 2021 with the aim of lifting 5 million children out of poverty by 2030 by ensuring free, effective access for vulnerable children to education, childcare, healthcare, healthy nutrition, and housing, explicitly names Roma children as one of its six target groups. The recent communication on strengthening the European Child Guarantee announces an upcoming Guidance Note for Member States on Roma children. Childcare and support for children are also covered by the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (Social Pillar), chiefly in its Principle 11, while No Poverty is Goal 1 of the UN **Sustainable Development Goals**.

With this research, ERGO Network aims to provide data and strong grassroots evidence about the situation of Roma children in Europe, with a specific focus on child poverty and preventing family separation, in order to contribute to better policy-making and to inform the implementation of EU initiatives such as the Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation, the European Semester, the Social Pillar and its Action Plan, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, and the strengthened European Child Guarantee, among others. The findings of this report will also feed into advocacy around relevant policy initiatives at national level.



Methodology

Between April and September 2026, ERGO Network researchers in **Bulgaria** (*Integro Association*), Czechia (*Life Together*), **Hungary** (*Autonómia Foundation*), **Romania** (*Sastipen - Roma Center for Health Policies*), **Slovakia** (*Roma Advocacy and Research Centre*) and **Spain** (*Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia*) prepared comprehensive national case studies about Roma children in their country, focusing on child poverty and the prevention of family separation.

In ***Bulgaria***, the research combined a desk review of national and international research, strategic documents, statistical data, reports by international organisations, and civil society analysis with evidence from Integro Association's own research, observations, and fieldwork. The latter draws on the organisation's long-standing engagement with Roma communities in different regions of the country, providing direct insight into child poverty, social exclusion, intergenerational transmission of poverty, and risks of family separation.

Read Bulgaria's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***here.***

In ***Czechia***, the research drew primarily on Life Together's long-standing direct work with 1 292 families and 4 522 children, ongoing since 2006, as well as the organisation's statistics, indicators, surveys, and previous ERGO Network case studies. This was complemented by interviews, observation, direct fieldwork in families' homes, and extensive case-file evidence documenting families' social and economic circumstances and support needs. The research focused mainly on Roma families experiencing poverty in socially excluded localities and hostels, primarily in the Moravian-Silesian region (specifically the areas of Ostrava and its surroundings, Karviná, Bohumín, Havířov, Horní Suchá, Orlová, Petřvald, Frýdek-Místek, Nový Jičín, Bílovec, Studénka, Opava, Budišov nad Budišovkou, and Krnov), while also including parts of the former Sudetenland (mainly Osoblaha and Bruntál), but the findings are relevant for the national level.

Read Czechia's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***here****.*

In ***Hungary***, recent national analyses and case studies were collected and reviewed, complemented by evidence from relevant programmes implemented by the Autonómia Foundation. The contribution relies mainly on national data, illustrated by specific local examples where relevant. Particular use was also made of a 2025 study by Tibor Béres and Emőke Both, examining operational anomalies in the child protection system.

Read Hungary's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***here****.*

In ***Romania***, a mixed-methods, community-based approach combined desk research with qualitative fieldwork. Alongside the review of policy documents, legislation, statistics, and existing research, 15 semi-structured interviews and 5 focus groups were conducted with around 50 participants, including Roma health and school mediators, social workers, education and health professionals, civil society representatives, community leaders, and Roma parents. Fieldwork sought to best convey lived experience and covered ten Roma communities across the counties of Gorj and Mehedinți in South-West Oltenia, Neamț in the North-East, and Tulcea and Constanța in the South-East, selected to reflect different socio-economic conditions, settlement patterns, and levels of institutional engagement.

Read Romania's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***here****.*

In ***Slovakia***, the research was based primarily on secondary analysis of documents, research studies, public policies, and existing data, complemented by knowledge accumulated through the research team's long-standing work with Roma communities. A key limitation is the lack of systematically collected ethnicity-disaggregated data: some available evidence therefore relies on ascribed ethnicity or data from the Atlas of Roma Communities, while official statistics and legislation frequently use the broader category of children from a "socially disadvantaged background", which includes many children from marginalised Roma communities.

Read Slovakia's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***here****.*

In ***Spain***, the methodology combined desk research with field-based qualitative evidence. National and European research, policy documents, institutional sources, and available data on poverty, education, housing, discrimination, and access to services were complemented by FAGiC's grassroots knowledge and direct engagement over many years with Roma families, educators, local professionals, young people, and community actors. While the desk analysis covers Spain as a whole, the qualitative evidence focuses on Catalonia, where FAGiC's community work provides direct insight into the concrete needs of Roma children and their families.

Read Spain's national case study on Roma child poverty and the prevention of family separation ***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, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.
- A detailed look at the situation of Roma children in the countries covered by the report, with a particular focus on Roma child poverty and its role in perpetuating the very harmful practice of family separation.
- Concrete recommendations for fighting Roma child poverty and preventing family separation, as well as improving the overall wellbeing of Roma children in Europe.

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

This synthesis report was written by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network staff team in Brussels. It was endorsed by the participating researchers and national contributors in October 2026.





National researchers

Kamen Makaveev, expert for European programmes and projects, is affiliated with ***Integro Association* (Bulgaria)**, a civil society organisation led by representatives of the Roma community, which brings together 10 local Roma civil society organisations from different parts of the country, united by their common goal to achieve an equal and respected position of the Roma community among the other members of Bulgarian society. Integro strives to give visibility to the problems and needs of the Roma from remote settlements. The organisation's activities are aimed at community mobilisation and creating an active Roma leadership capable of challenging the passivity of both Roma and public authorities, so that they can share the responsibility for overcoming inequality, social exclusion and poverty among Roma, and for achieving cohesion and prosperity at the local level and in society as a whole. The association's guiding principles are the promotion and protection of human rights, democratic procedures, transparency, partnership and trust in the community and society. For more information: www.integrobg.org/en/.

Mgr. Sri Kumar Vishwanathan, **Mgr. Bc. Helena Jedináková, Bc. Magda Odehnalová, DiS Pavla Vjačková, Margita Lebicová,** and **Radka Moutelíková** are affiliated with ***Vzájemné Soužití – Life Together* (Czechia)**. Founded in 1997 in Ostrava, the organisation works to improve the rights and living conditions of Roma communities, especially in structurally excluded localities. Its activities focus on education, housing, employment, and social inclusion, with an emphasis on empowerment and intercultural dialogue. Vzájemné soužití has played a historic role in challenging school segregation, supporting Roma families in the *D.H. and Others v. Czechia* case, and continues to promote inclusive education and desegregation in the Moravian-Silesian Region. For more information: www.vzajemnesouziti.cz.

Tibor Béres and **Miklós Kóródi** are affiliated with the ***Autonómia Foundation* (Hungary)**, an independent, private foundation established in 1990 to strengthen civil society, support excluded groups and, above all, promote Roma integration. Its aim is to support the development of civil society in Hungary, including Roma integration. It does this primarily by supporting civic initiatives in which people mobilise local resources to achieve their goals. Since its establishment, the Foundation has supported and implemented hundreds of Roma inclusion programmes, participated in numerous research projects, and has an extensive network of contacts. For more information: www.autonomia.hu.

Daniel Rădulescu, PhD in Sociology, is the President of ***Sastipen – Roma Center for Health Policies* (Romania)**, a national Roma-led civil society organisation established in 2007, dedicated to promoting Roma inclusion, health equity, and social justice. Sastipen coordinates a nationwide network of approximately 470 Roma health mediators, and supports 30 Integrated Community Service Centers, operating in Roma communities across the country. Through direct community engagement, the organisation facilitates access to healthcare, education, and social protection services for vulnerable Roma families. It also conducts research, policy analysis, and advocacy on child poverty, discrimination, family vulnerability, and access to services, applying a participatory, community-based, and rights-based approach. For more information: www.sastipen.ro

Zuzana Havírová, PhD, is the President of the ***Roma Advocacy and Research Centre* (Slovakia)**, a civil society organisation established in 2014, dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organisation contributes to the shaping of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalised localities. The organisation focuses on supporting Roma community development through an inclusive approach, based on active cooperation between the minority and the majority population. RARC is based in Skalica, where it has built outstanding partnerships with various local actors, as well as being involved in national and international activities. For more information: www.romadata.org.

Bianca Elena Galusca is the Head of the European & International Area and the Participation & Youth Area at ***FAGiC – the Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia*** **(Spain)**. Founded in 1991, FAGiC is an umbrella organisation bringing together 96 local Roma associations across Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in the region. Its mission is to defend and promote the rights of Roma people, fight antigypsyism and racism, advocate for equality in employment, housing, education, and youth participation, as well as access to rights, and channel Roma communities' voices by creating spaces for meaningful dialogue with mainstream society at both national and international levels. For more information: www.fagic.org.



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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 population groups hardest hit by **poverty, unemployment, social exclusion** and very poor overall socio-economic outcomes. This pre-existing state of dire inequality, against the backdrop of **widespread, historical antigypsyism**, was **made worse in recent years** by sharp **spikes in the cost of living** and inflation, the **rise of the far right**, an ongoing state of **warfare around Europe**, and a growing political and budgetary **emphasis on competitiveness and defence**.

In ***Bulgaria***, the Roma are one of the most marginalised communities, facing high levels of poverty and material deprivation, low employment, housing insecurity, educational segregation, and limited access to quality services. In 2022, 63.2% of Roma were at risk of poverty and 81.6% at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 25% of ethnic Bulgarians. More recent data show that, in 2025, 65.5% of people who self-identified as Roma were at risk of poverty, compared with 15.1% of ethnic Bulgarians. Roma children are particularly affected: 73.5% experienced material deprivation, while Roma children accounted for 46.5% of all poor children and 56.7% of children living in severe housing deprivation. Poverty is compounded by insecure and overcrowded housing, limited access to healthy food, education, healthcare, and social services. Antigypsyism and institutional stereotypes can further aggravate hardship, with poverty-related difficulties sometimes interpreted as 'bad parenting', increasing the risk of child protection intervention and family separation.

In ***Czechia***, an estimated 250 000 – 300 000 Roma live in the country, with approximately half residing in socially excluded localities and substandard, dormitory-style housing. Poverty, housing exclusion, unemployment, over-indebtedness, and limited access to quality services reinforce intergenerational disadvantage, particularly in structurally excluded regions. In 2016, more than 58% of Roma were at risk of income poverty, around six times the rate of the majority population. The country counts 606 socially excluded localities, while more recent approaches identify approximately 238 municipalities with high levels of social exclusion. Housing insecurity is particularly severe in Ostrava, where more than 4 200 households, representing around 7 100 people, live in housing exclusion. Roma families in these areas frequently experience unstable housing, weak employment opportunities, poor access to services, and long-standing institutional mistrust. These conditions disproportionately affect children, restricting educational opportunities and contributing to the persistence of poverty and exclusion across generations.

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

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

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

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

ROMA CHILD POVERTY AND THE PREVENTION OF FAMILY SEPARATION

The broad consensus in all six countries covered in this report confirms that **Roma children continue to face systemic barriers to enjoying their rights**, resulting in persistent inequalities across all areas of their lives. **Poverty and material deprivation remain widespread**, while many children grow up in overcrowded, substandard or **insecure housing**, often in segregated or marginalised areas with **limited access to services**. Poor living conditions, food insecurity, environmental hazards, and geographical isolation directly **affect children's health and wellbeing**, while access to healthcare and specialised services remains patchy. Antigypsyism, segregation, poverty-related barriers, and ineffective support systems continue to **undermine learning, inclusion, wellbeing, and future prospects**.

Poverty remains a decisive determinant of the lived experience of Roma children, as families struggle to afford basic needs and cover survival costs. Parents face **insecure employment, inadequate social protection, administrative barriers and discrimination**, while support services are often fragmented or difficult to reach. These pressures can **accumulate into family crisis**, particularly where **poverty and inadequate housing are interpreted as parental failure**, rather than as grounds for support. Roma children remain disproportionately exposed to child-protection intervention and **family separation**, while preventive family support, family-based alternatives and reunification assistance remain insufficient. Roma children's **participation in decisions affecting them is also limited**, and access to justice is weakened by low legal awareness, mistrust of institutions and **insufficient child-friendly, culturally sensitive systems**.

Despite some positive trends, such as expanded mediation, community-based services, and early-intervention initiatives, most **national systems remain ill-equipped to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty affecting Roma children**. National Roma Strategic Frameworks and Child Guarantee Action Plans acknowledge many of the right challenges, yet **implementation remains uneven** and too often dependent on short-term projects. Weak monitoring, insufficiently disaggregated data, unclear accountability, inadequate funding, limited local capacity and insufficient participation continue to **hinder progress**. Above all, policies still too often address education, health, housing, poverty and child protection separately, rather than through an **integrated children's rights approach,** centred on the wellbeing of the child.

The following chapters explore these realities in depth, highlighting both the persistent barriers and the promising practices identified across countries. They point to the urgent need to **reduce Roma child poverty,** guarantee **adequate and secure housing**, and ensure **equal access to quality education, healthcare and other essential services**. They also underline the importance of **supporting parents and communities**, providing timely family support, and ensuring that poverty never becomes a reason for **unnecessary family separation**. Finally, they stress that meaningful progress depends on **tackling antigypsyism**, strengthening **participation and access to justice**, and ensuring that every Roma child can grow up safely, remain with their family, participate in decisions affecting them, and enjoy equal opportunities to thrive.

Demographic profile of Roma children

Roma children constitute a **significant share of Roma communities across all six countries**, although their exact number is often difficult to establish. Official figures need to be treated cautiously in all cases, because **ethnicity is often not systematically recorded**, or depends on voluntary self-identification in the countries reviewed. Fear of discrimination, stigma, and **distrust of public authorities** contribute to under-reporting (HU, RO).

In all countries, the Roma population is **consistently much younger than the majority population**, with children and young people making up a substantially larger share of Roma communities. This reflects **higher birth rates and larger families**, as well as earlier transitions into partnership and parenthood (CZ, HU, RO). At the same time, the older generations represent a much smaller share of the Roma population, a pattern linked in part to **lower life expectancy and poorer health and socio-economic conditions** (BG, CZ). This demographic profile stands in marked contrast to the broader ageing trends observed in the general population (BG, RO, ES).

- In **Bulgaria**, the 2021 Census recorded 266 720 people as Roma, including approximately 70 950 children under 15, but international estimates put the overall Roma population at around 750 000, meaning that the real number of Roma children is likely substantially higher. Children aged 0–14 represent 26.6% of the Roma population, compared with 13.9% of Bulgaria's overall population in 2025.

- In **Czechia**, where precise data disaggregated by ethnicity are not collected, the Roma population is estimated at 250 000 - 300 000, and Roma children at roughly 3–5% of the overall child population. Education data identify around 39 000 Roma children in primary schools, representing 3.9% of pupils, while their representation falls to around 2% in preschool and 1–1.2% in secondary education.

- In **Hungary**, demographic estimates suggest approximately **200 000 - 250 000 Roma children**, accounting for around **13% of all children**, while an estimated 17–20% of newborns are Roma. The overall Roma population is estimated at 700 000 - 900 000, considerably higher than census figures.

- In **Romania**, 569 477 people self-identified as Roma in the 2021 census, although the actual population is estimated at 1.2 - 2 million. Approximately one-third of Roma are under 15 and more than half are under 25, making Roma communities considerably younger than the ageing general population.

- In **Slovakia**, only estimated numbers are collected as a percentage of the number of inhabitants in a given locality, and these combined give a total between 150 000 and 190 000 Roma children. Children under 16 constitute 39.4% of the Roma population, compared with 15.3% of the overall population

- In **Spain**, no reliable figure exists for the number of Roma children, although the overall Roma population is estimated at 725 000 - 750 000 and 66% of Roma are under 30, again illustrating a markedly young demographic profile.

In terms of geographic distribution, in half the countries **the Roma are disproportionately concentrated in some of the most disadvantaged regions**, where poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and low availability of services are prevalent (HU, RO, SK).

In Bulgaria, the Roma population is split roughly evenly between urban and rural areas. There is consensus across respondents that living in segregated, informal communities, in **disadvantaged and underdeveloped areas of the country**, with few opportunities and inadequate coverage of service provision is the main contributing factor to **the poor social inclusion and educational performance** of Roma children.

Most Roma children grow up experiencing poverty and material deprivation (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). The majority also **live in inadequate housing**, experiencing overcrowding (CZ, RO, ES), insecurity of accommodation (CZ, ES), life in informal, segregated, and marginalised settlements (RO, SK), and the looming risk of forced evictions (ES). These circumstances take **a significant toll on a child's well-being and mental health** (CZ, SK), manifesting as tiredness, irritability, frustration, insecurity, and behavioural problems, as well as impaired self-confidence, self-esteem and perceived competence.

Viki and her brother Daniel lived with their parents in an apartment within a socially excluded locality. Even though their circumstances were challenging, the children had their own space, a degree of privacy, and a relatively regular daily routine at home. Subsequently, however, the family had to move to a hostel, which significantly disrupted their household functioning. The hostel provides limited privacy and is characterised by long-term high noise levels, frequent turnover of residents, and an overall highly unstable environment. This transition gradually began to impact the children's daily lives. At home, they lack the quiet environment and space needed to concentrate, which complicates both their school preparation and proper rest. The constant commotion and lack of privacy have resulted in fatigue, poorer concentration, and lower overall psychological wellbeing. Their academic performance and motivation are steadily deteriorating.

CZECHIA

Substandard living conditions and a poor emotional state lead to **educational underperformance** (BG, HU, SK), further compounded by exclusion from the education system (BG), school segregation (HU, SK, ES), and unequal access to learning opportunities and resources (SK). Beyond education, living in rural, remote, or segregated areas means **poorer access to all services** (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), including childcare, healthcare, transport, and social services, but also **employment opportunities** for the parents and carers (HU, ES, SK), translating into **low family incomes** and increased poverty and material deprivation for the household. Overwhelmingly, and in all of these areas, **Roma children experience persistent antigypsyism** (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES).

"Most families in the community have many children, and despite parents' efforts, poverty often limits their access to education, healthcare and extracurricular activities. Children grow up with fewer opportunities than their non-Roma peers from the very beginning."

SOCIAL WORKER, ROMANIA

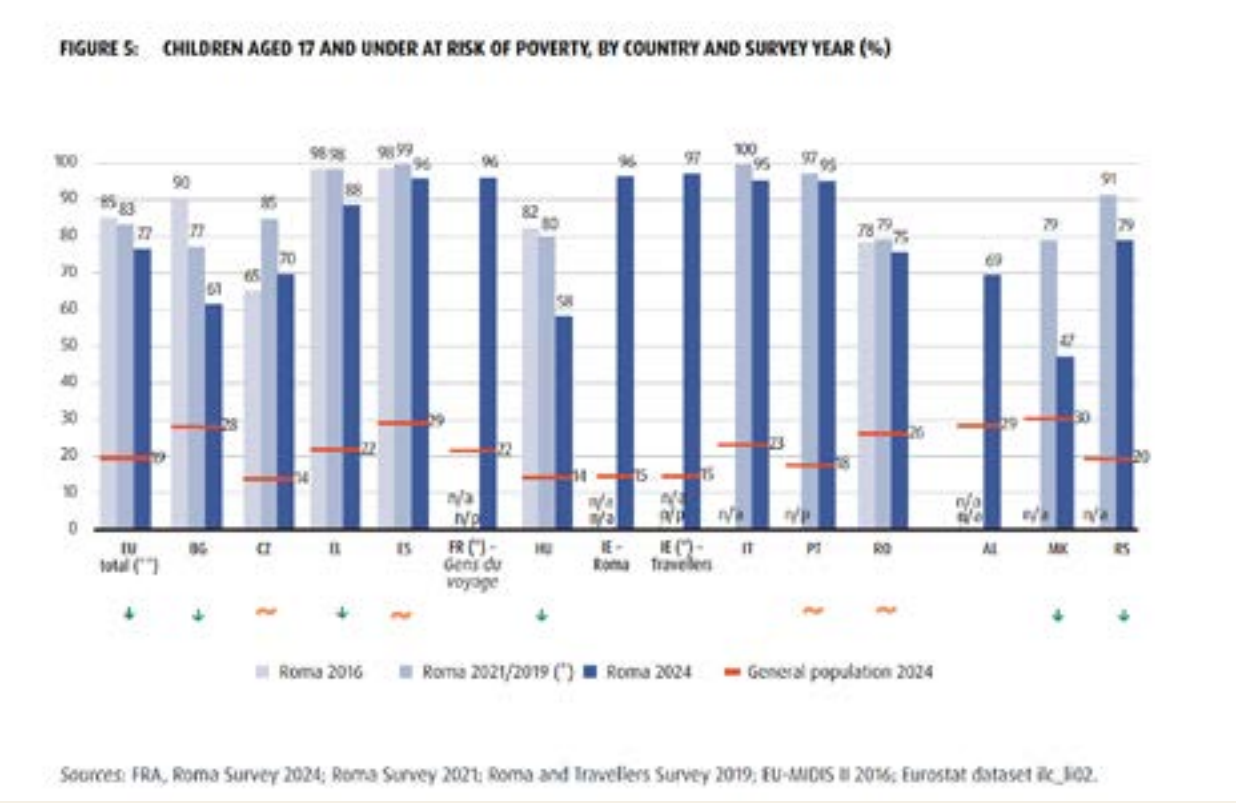
In addition to the above, the life experience of Roma children in the countries reviewed in this report is also impacted by issues such as **caring responsibilities** for younger family members (CZ), **lack of extracurricular activities** and facilities (CZ, RO), **institutional distrust** (ES, HU), overrepresentation in **residential care** (CZ, HU), administrative and **digital exclusion** (ES), barriers in accessing **benefits** (ES), **migration** background (ES).

Roma child poverty

While several countries lack child poverty data that are disaggregated by ethnicity, it is still possible to establish that **the scale of Roma child poverty in the six countries is staggering**. In most countries, poverty affects at least half, and often a very large majority, of Roma children or Roma households with children.

- In Bulgaria, **65.5% of people self-identifying as Roma live in poverty**, compared with 15.1% of the Bulgarian ethnic group, while Roma children account for **46.5% of all poor children in the country**.
- In Czechia, around **77% of Roma are at risk of poverty and roughly 20% live in severe poverty**, suggesting that the large majority of Roma children grow up in families affected by poverty.
- In Hungary, available estimates suggest that **around half or more of Roma children live in income poverty**.
- Romania has no reliable national Roma-child poverty rate, but reports **severe and widespread material deprivation among Roma families** with children.
- In Slovakia, the at-risk-of-poverty rate reaches **91% among children living in marginalised Roma communities and 73% among children in integrated Roma households**, compared with 17% of children in the general population.
- In Spain, Roma child poverty is estimated at **86.8–89%, with severe child poverty at 70.2%**.

In its most recent survey on the Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries, released in October 2025, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights notes: "77% of Roma/Traveller children aged under 18 live in households at risk of poverty. This rate is lower than in 2016 (85%) but still much higher than that for children from the general population (19% in the EU-27 in 2024 and 20% in 2018). The share of Roma/Traveller children aged 17 and under living in severe material deprivation is also lower (40%) than it was in 2016 (66%)."



Material deprivation is rampant throughout all six countries, all of which identify **food insecurity** and **overcrowded or substandard housing** as main areas of concern, alongside **limited access to leisure**, socialising, and other opportunities for children. Other aspects include lack of **adequate clothing and other basic goods** (BG, CZ, HU, RO), difficulties keeping the home adequately warm or **meeting utility costs** (BG, HU, RO, ES), and **lack of school materials** or digital equipment (BG, CZ, RO, ES).

73.5% of Roma children experience material deprivation, while 4.6% cannot meet any of the 13 basic needs measured by the Material Deprivation Index. 43.7% of Roma households cannot afford meat, chicken, fish, or a vegetarian equivalent every other day, and 45.6% cannot keep their home adequately warm.

BULGARIA

The causes are structural and mutually reinforcing. Low parental education restricts employment prospects, while **unemployment, precarious or informal work, and low wages** keep household incomes low. These patterns are reported throughout the six countries. **Territorial and residential segregation** severely impact access to jobs, schools, services, and prospects (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK), while **labour market discrimination** leads to exclusion from employment (CZ, HU, RO, SK, ES), and **inadequate social protection** leaves families without sufficient income support (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES). **Larger households face particularly high poverty risks** (BG, HU, RO, SK), but the Slovak figures are especially striking: in marginalised Roma communities, the poverty risk rises from 74% in households with one dependent child to 87% with three children, 92% with four and 98% with five or more. **Single-parent households** with dependent children face a poverty rate of 96%.

Lack of adequate housing and of quiet and appropriate places to study undermines educational outcomes (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), while families struggle to afford transport, school supplies or participation in extracurricular activities (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Food insecurity affects children's health and wellbeing throughout the si countries**, while hunger can directly impair concentration at school (CZ). Persistent stress, deprivation, discrimination and insecurity harm children's mental health (CZ, HU, RO, SK, ES). Poverty also **limits children's access to leisure, sport and social participation** throughout the countries covered by the research, reducing opportunities to develop friendships, confidence, social networks and a sense of belonging beyond the immediate family or segregated neighbourhood.

Anička, aged eight, lives with her parents and three siblings in a single room in a hostel. She has no suitable place to study and frequently helps care for her younger siblings. She therefore arrives at school tired and unprepared. Her teachers interpret this as a lack of interest in learning, while in reality she lacks the conditions that would allow her to concentrate and prepare for school.

CZECHIA

Across the six countries, the **intergenerational character of Roma poverty is evident**: children raised in poor households face weaker educational outcomes and early school leaving, poorer health, and reduced labour-market prospects, **making poverty in adulthood much more likely**. Factors such as family income, place of residence, educational level of parents, and level of access to services **strongly influence life chances and access to opportunities**.

What is transmitted is not a culture of poverty, but **the persistence of structural barriers,** including poverty itself. What is needed are **integrated approaches confronting the structural inequalities and antigypsyism** that shape access to income, housing, healthcare, education, employment, and other services, or **Roma child poverty will continue to reproduce** itself across generations.

"Poverty affects almost every family in our community. Parents want their children to succeed, but many struggle to provide basic needs such as adequate food, school supplies, or transportation to school. When poverty persists across generations, children grow up seeing exclusion as normal. Without targeted support and real opportunities, many of them risk repeating the same cycle of poverty experienced by their parents and grandparents."

ROMA COMMUNITY LEADER, ROMANIA

While **poverty itself should never be interpreted as wilful neglect**, there is a clear systemic tendency to regard severe deprivation as parental incompetence. Material deprivation, inadequate housing, and unstable income are considered **evidence of parental failure** (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES), while school absences and difficulties complying with administrative requirements can similarly **draw families into scrutiny or intervention** (BG, CZ, ES). Even where legal safeguards prohibit removing children because of poverty or poor housing, **material deprivation continues to influence child-protection decisions** (HU, SK). Insufficient, inadequate, or untimely preventive family support allows multiple vulnerabilities to accumulate until they become a family crisis (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES). Breaking the cycle requires **much more than emergency interventions**, it needs **systemic investment** in supporting families and children.

A Roma mother caring for several children is facing housing instability and irregular income. The children are cared for and strongly attached to their family, but the material conditions raise concern among services. Without mediation, difficulties with income, housing, school attendance, or administrative requirements can quickly escalate towards child-protection measures. With support, the focus could instead shift to stabilising income, accessing benefits and good housing, and maintaining the children's connection to school.

SPAIN

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to devote "particular attention [...] to **preventing and combating child poverty**", taking account of "the mechanisms that perpetuate **multigenerational poverty**" and supporting **Roma children and their families** across "employment, social services, education and early childhood education and care, health, housing and access to essential services, nutrition, and access to leisure activities".

Roma children and housing

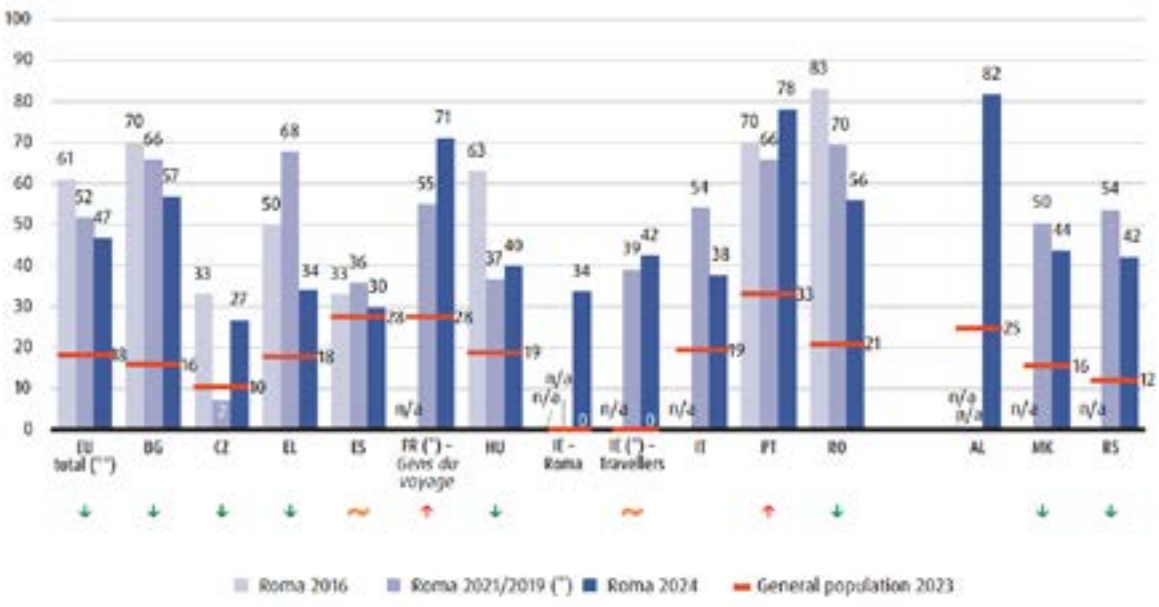
Across all six countries, **housing deprivation is one of the most visible dimensions** of Roma child poverty and social exclusion. Roma children disproportionately grow up in overcrowded, substandard or insecure accommodation, with housing problems closely intertwined with **territorial exclusion and unequal access to opportunities**. In many countries, these difficulties are further compounded by **residential segregation and geographic isolation** (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK), informal or inadequately regulated housing (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), insecure tenure (BG, RO, SK, ES), and discrimination in access to adequate housing (BG, CZ, HU, SK, ES).

37% of Roma households experience housing poverty, compared with 24% of the general population. 91% live in overcrowded housing, while 17% lack drinking water, compared with 2% overall. Despite several initiatives aimed at clearing the settlements, and four rounds of EU-funded desegregation programmes, around 1 300 – 1 600 segregated settlements remain, concentrated mainly in small villages in the north-east and south-west of the country.

HUNGARY

In its most recent survey on the Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries, released in October 2025, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights notes: "On average, Roma/Traveller children (aged 15 and under) live in housing deprivation more often (52%) than Roma/Travellers aged 25–60 (43%). [...] On average, the overcrowding rates are highest for Roma/Traveller children aged 15 and under, exceeding 90% in all countries except Spain (79%) and Ireland (for Travellers: 72%)". FRA also reports that 22% of Roma/Traveller children aged 15 and under live without tap water, with rates of 25% in Bulgaria, 10% in Czechia and 34% in Romania.

FIGURE 25: PEOPLE LIVING IN HOUSING DEPRIVATION, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2024; Roma Survey 2021; Roma and Travellers Survey 2019; EU-MIDIS II 2016; Eurostat dataset tessi291.

Overcrowding is a recurring problem in all countries, with several generations or larger families sometimes sharing very limited space. Children **lack privacy and quiet places** to sleep, study or play, while close proximity also increases **hygiene and health risks**. Poor-quality dwellings can additionally be damp, cold or badly insulated, have structural defects or unsafe installations, and rely on inadequate heating (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK). In many segregated or marginalised communities, the problem extends beyond the home itself to **poor infrastructure and inadequate access to basic utilities**, including a lack of safe drinking water, sanitation and sewerage, electricity, heating, waste collection, or paved roads and transport (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK).

Overcrowding affects 80% of Roma households in predominantly Roma neighbourhoods, compared with 69% in non-segregated areas. In 2025, 49.7% of Roma households had difficulties paying housing costs, 45.6% could not keep their home adequately warm and 69.0% could not afford to replace worn-out furniture.

BULGARIA

"Many children live in overcrowded houses without adequate heating or sanitation. During winter, some children miss school because they are sick or because families cannot afford to heat their homes. Housing deprivation affects every aspect of children's lives."

ROMA HEALTH MEDIATOR, ROMANIA

Housing deprivation is frequently intertwined with **environmental injustice**. Roma families in segregated or marginalised communities can experience **limited access to safe drinking water** (BG, HU, RO, SK), **sanitation** or sewerage (BG, RO, SK), **electricity** (HU, RO, SK), **heating** (BG, HU, RO), **waste collection** (BG, SK), paved **roads and transport** connections (CZ, SK). **Environmental hazards** include proximity to waste dumps, polluted or industrial sites and flood-risk areas (BG, CZ, RO, SK), while outdated heating models based on burning solid fuels like wood, coal, or worse contribute to harmful air pollution (HU).

In 2025, two young girls died in a fire in the Mašličkovo settlement near Košice, while four children and their great-grandmother died in a fire in a modular dwelling in Veľký Šariš. In November the same year, three girls aged four, six and eight and their mother died when a small house caught fire in the Domky settlement in Kozárovce, where around 300 people live in a mix of legal and informal dwellings, many heated with wood-burning stoves. Nine children died in separate fires in Roma settlements in one year, illustrating the fatal consequences of unsafe and highly precarious housing conditions and inadequate infrastructure in marginalised communities.

SLOVAKIA

At the same time, adequate housing is often **financially out of reach for Roma families**, as many as 70% of whom experience poverty. High housing and energy costs, coupled with **low and irregular incomes**, place significant housing pressure on families (BG, CZ, HU, ES), while they also struggle to access affordable or social housing (HU, SK, ES). Precarious employment makes it **difficult to meet landlord requirements** for employment contracts, payslips, or financial guarantees (ES). Some Roma families pay disproportionately high rents for very poor-quality accommodation and have little prospect of accessing mortgages (CZ). **Antigypsyism in the housing market narrows available options**, with Roma families reporting rejection by private landlords or discriminatory access to rental as well as social housing (BG, CZ, HU, SK, ES).

Patrik is a ten-year-old boy who lives with his parents and three younger siblings in a small rental apartment on the outskirts of the city. The family moved into this apartment after being forced to quickly leave their previous residence. They had received an eviction notice due to long-term financial difficulties and rent arrears. The current housing is in very poor condition, with damp walls, leaking windows, outdated wiring, and frequent power outages. The family cannot afford sports and after-school activities for the children, and a low-cost facility is located very far away, with poor transport links. Patrik spends most of his time in a crowded apartment with no space to rest, study, or play. Low income, debt, and rejection by landlords leave Patrik's parents with no options to improve the situation for themselves and their children.

CZECHIA

Families living in undocumented dwellings, without secure tenure, or in informal settlements face the **constant threat of losing their home** (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Forced or threatened evictions** can expose families to **homelessness** or relocation to even more marginalised areas (BG, RO, ES), trigger severe physical and emotional **distress**, entail extensive **loss of personal belongings** (often including important documents, medication, clothing, study materials etc.), **disrupt children's access to education and healthcare** (BG, CZ, RO, ES), and **destroy community support** networks (CZ, RO, ES).

In Zaharna Fabrika, Sofia, dozens of Roma homes were demolished on 15 April 2025, and around 200 people were affected, including children and other vulnerable residents. Many families subsequently stayed with relatives, in tents, or in temporary accommodation. Two weeks after the demolition, more than 170 people, including children, were reportedly still without shelter. By June, only two families had been accommodated in new housing. In Lozenets, Stara Zagora, more than 450 structures have reportedly been removed since 2015, with further demolitions in 2025–2026. Fieldwork in 2026 identified affected households, including 31 children.

BULGARIA

"For Roma children, forced eviction means much more than losing a home. It can mean changing school, losing access to services, and moving to an even more marginalised area. For families already living in poverty, the threat of eviction creates additional instability and makes an already difficult situation even worse."

ROMA CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

Neither poverty nor **inadequate housing should be treated as evidence that parents are failing** to care for their children. And yet, low-quality or insecure housing can become an underlying factor in child-protection intervention, when **structural deprivation is interpreted as parental neglect** rather than as a need for housing and social support in all six countries. Keeping families together and supporting children to thrive should include **income support** schemes, access to social or at least **affordable housing**, **desegregation** plans, **quality employment** opportunities for parents, **regularisation of informal settlements** and clarification of tenure, and **renovation** plans.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to "**prevent forced evictions**" through early warning and mediation, to support people at risk of eviction and, where necessary, "provide **adequate alternative housing**, focusing particularly on families", as well as to ensure **equal access to housing assistance** while taking account of "the specific needs of individuals and families".



Nanda Mentesheva for Fine Acts

Roma children and healthcare

The health outcomes of Roma children, which are much poorer than those of majority children, are **closely tied to the social determinants of health** such as poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, environmental hazards, geographical isolation, weak access to services, and discrimination. These compounding factors result in **health inequalities from the earliest stages of life** in all the countries covered by this report. Antigypsyism and discriminatory treatment within healthcare systems further restrict access, undermine trust and can discourage families from seeking timely care (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES).

For some Roma children, **inequalities begin before birth**, as uneven access to antenatal and postnatal care is reported among Roma women living in poverty or marginalised communities (BG, CZ, RO, SK), with barriers including distance and transport (RO, SK), financial constraints (SK), lack of access to a regular doctor or specialist (CZ), and mistrust or poor communication with healthcare providers (CZ, SK). Bulgaria reports gaps despite a legal framework formally granting uninsured pregnant women access to healthcare, while Slovakia also points to **higher infant mortality** in socially excluded Roma communities. In Hungary, there is growing concern about **the spread of syphilis**, including cases of transmission from mothers to babies during pregnancy.

Despite vaccinations being formally available in all six countries, **coverage and uptake of preventive healthcare and immunisation remain unsatisfactory** (BG, CZ, RO, SK). In Hungary, while childhood vaccination coverage remains generally high, access to preventive care is weaker in disadvantaged rural regions (HU). In Spain, continuity of vaccination can be disrupted by unstable housing, mobility, and administrative difficulties. Barriers include insufficient information or misinformation (BG, CZ, RO, SK), administrative obstacles (BG, RO, ES), geographical distance or transport problems (HU, RO, SK), shortages of healthcare professionals (CZ, HU), and difficulties in communication or culturally appropriate provision (SK, ES). **Mistrust of institutions and healthcare systems** is a recurring obstacle throughout the six countries, often rooted in previous negative experiences and discrimination.

Around 15% of Roma children do not have the full set of mandatory vaccinations, with the proportion thought to be higher in isolated communities. UNICEF reports that MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) coverage among Roma children may be 20–30 percentage points below that of the general population. 52.3% of Roma children live in families which cannot afford meat, chicken or fish every other day, compared with 9.7% for majority children. A pilot project in 10 municipalities, developed under the European Child Guarantee, combines home visits by health and social professionals, counselling for pregnant women and families with children aged 0–3, and referral to health and social services. However, access remains weaker in rural, remote and economically disadvantaged municipalities, particularly for vulnerable Roma children, and implementation remains partial.

BULGARIA

Roma families experiencing poverty struggle to provide varied and nutritious diets, with **food poverty and inadequate nutrition** contributing to nutritional deficiencies and poorer health in all six countries. Researchers describe reliance on cheaper and nutritionally poorer food (CZ), inadequate or unbalanced diets (RO), and risks of both malnutrition and obesity associated with poverty and limited dietary choice (SK). Poverty also affects children's access to sport and leisure, regular sleep and continuity of care (ES), while rising food and energy costs further squeeze already limited household resources (HU).

Inadequate housing is reported as a major health determinant throughout the research, while overcrowding and poor sanitation increase exposure to communicable disease (BG, CZ, RO, SK). Factors contributing to **recurrent health issues** include dampness, cold and inadequate insulation (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK), unsafe or polluting heating (HU, SK), contaminated water (BG, SK), inadequate waste collection (BG, SK), pests (BG, CZ), and polluted surroundings (BG, HU, RO, SK). Researchers report respiratory infections (CZ, HU, RO, SK), gastrointestinal illness (RO, SK), and heightened risks of tuberculosis and hepatitis in particularly deprived environments (CZ, SK). The Czech fieldwork additionally recorded cases of whooping cough, impetigo, scabies and diphtheria in socially excluded localities.

A family with five minor children aged 6, 9, 11, 14, and 17 moved from a settlement in Slovakia to Czechia, in search of a better life. Initially, they stayed with a sister in a socially excluded locality, where they all lived together in a single room. The adults slept on the floor, and the children shared one bed. In that particular locality, infectious and skin diseases - especially Hepatitis A, viral infections, and scabies - occurred repeatedly. At one point, the family was ordered into temporary quarantine by the Regional Public Health Authority due to an outbreak. The family was then supported into more suitable accommodation and they were placed in a hostel, but subsequently a bedbug infestation was discovered there.

CZECHIA

The **mental health and emotional wellbeing of Roma children is an increasing concern** in every country covered by the research. Poverty, housing insecurity, discrimination, social exclusion and family stress contribute to anxiety and psychological distress (CZ, HU, SK, ES), concentration and behavioural difficulties (CZ, SK), low self-esteem and emotional distress (ES), while **parental and maternal stress** can also affect children's emotional and behavioural development (SK). At the same time, appropriate **support remains difficult to obtain**: psychological and mental-health provision is insufficient in all countries, culturally sensitive counselling is scarce (RO, ES), and families may face stigma (BG, ES), long waiting lists (ES) or administrative barriers (ES).

For Roma children with disabilities, developmental difficulties, or neurodiverse conditions, **delayed diagnosis and difficulties accessing specialised assessment**, rehabilitation or early intervention are widely reported (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). Families may struggle to navigate healthcare and social-service systems (CZ, ES), or be digitally excluded (ES). Children in marginalised communities are **less likely to be reached by specialist and early-intervention** services (BG, SK), and children with disabilities may encounter discrimination on top of the barriers associated with their disability (RO, SK). Hungary's national policy framework is criticised for giving insufficient attention to the specific healthcare needs of children with disabilities and neurodevelopmental conditions (HU).

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are also inadequately addressed, as Roma teens need accessible, confidential, and non-stigmatising information and services. Early marriage, early pregnancy or early parenthood increase the **importance of comprehensive support** (BG, SK). **Sexual and reproductive health education remains insufficient** for some teens and communities (BG, RO, SK), and some issues remain taboo or receive little sustained attention within families and services (CZ). **The cost of contraception and fear of stigma** can deter girls and young women from accessing it (BG), while culturally sensitive and confidential service provision is deemed particularly important for Roma girls and young women (ES). Hungary's Roma framework is criticised for the absence of specific measures addressing sexual and reproductive health.

A Roma parent needs to take **several children to multiple doctors** (CZ), travel long distances with poor transport connections and pay for expensive appointments and medicines (CZ, RO, SK), arrange childcare or bring all siblings along (CZ), **navigate referrals and administrative procedures** (CZ, RO, ES), and deal with unfamiliar digital systems (ES). Against a backdrop of poverty, deprivation, poor parental mental health, and a lifetime of systemic exclusion, **missed check-ups or vaccinations are then interpreted as parental negligence** (CZ). Health and social professionals can help prevent family crises when they recognise material deprivation early and **connect families to income support and integrated services** (ES). Addiction can compound poverty and volatile family environments, while **drug use is increasingly affecting younger people** and treatment and rehabilitation provision remains inadequate (CZ, HU). A harm-reduction approach is essential, treating dependency as a health condition instead of as a moral failure, and ensuring access to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

Mrs Kája is a mother of five children aged 9, 8, 6, 4, and 2, living in a socially excluded locality. The children have different paediatricians because of insufficient available spaces at local clinics, all located at a considerable distance. The costs associated with transport and medication make it difficult to adhere to deadlines for preventive check-ups and vaccinations. The children also require care from multiple specialists. Mrs Kája often attends medical appointments with all her children at once because she has no childcare options.

CZECHIA

Roma health mediators play a key role in helping Roma families navigate healthcare and connecting communities with services. Sastipen coordinates a nationwide network of approximately 470 Roma health mediators and supports 30 integrated community service centres operating in Roma communities.

"Many families seek medical assistance only when children's health problems become severe because they face transportation difficulties, lack financial resources, or have had negative experiences with public institutions."

ROMA HEALTH MEDIATOR, ROMANIA

The Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation calls on Member States to ensure effective **equal access without barriers to quality healthcare** and social services, including by facilitating **access for "Roma children to quality primary health care**, including primary prevention programmes, such as vaccination."



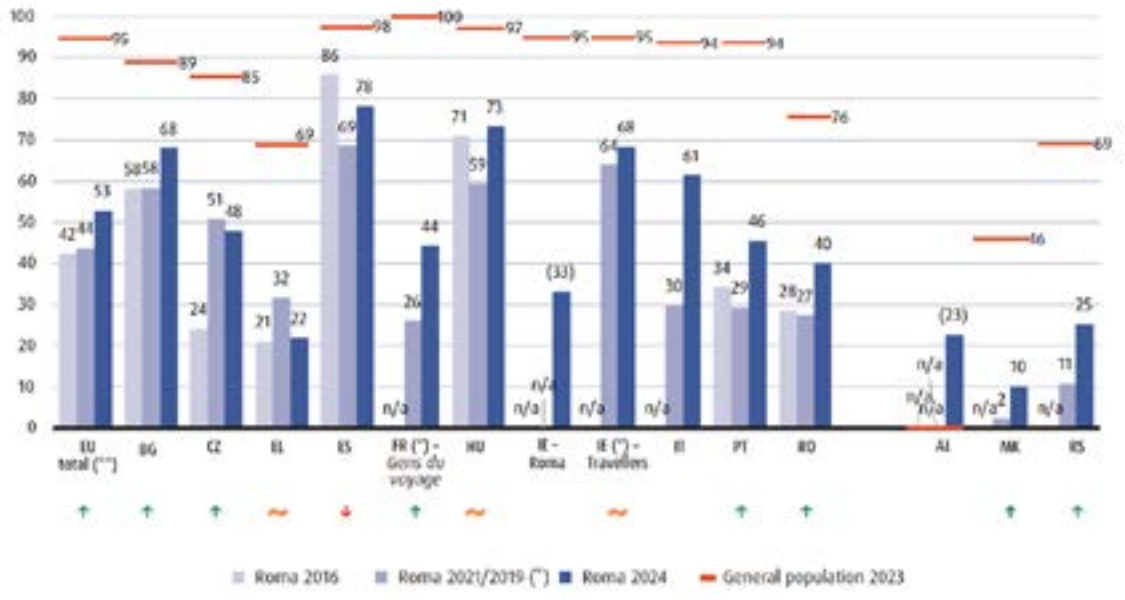
Roma children and education

Roma children experience **educational disadvantages from the earliest years** and throughout their learning experience, including into adulthood and through the lifecycle. Poverty, antigypsyism, and segregation, combined with insufficient and inadequate provision, reproduce **educational inequalities across generations**. Roma children are much more likely to leave school early without qualifications, which narrows access to further study, stable employment, and social mobility, thus **perpetuating the cycle of poverty and exclusion** experienced by families in all six countries covered by the research.

Inequality begins before compulsory schooling, at the youngest ages. Roma children **participate less in early childhood education and care** (BG, RO, SK, ES), while some also begin kindergarten later or miss developmental support before entering school (HU). Although formal fees have been removed or some supports are available, access to education continues to be **impeded by poverty and additional costs** (BG, RO, SK), lack of transport or distance from services (BG, RO, SK), insufficient kindergarten or childcare capacity (RO, SK), administrative obstacles (SK), lack of information among parents (CZ, RO), and language barriers or insufficient preparation of staff for working in multicultural settings (BG). Lower participation at this crucial stage can translate into **weaker school readiness and learning gaps** that children carry into primary education (HU, SK).

In its most recent survey on the Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries, released in October 2025, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights notes: "Every second Roma/Traveller child (53%) attends early childhood education. Although there has been improvement in comparison with 2016 (42%), this is still only about half of the proportion observed for children in the general population in the EU (95% in both 2023 and 2018). Only 32% of Roma/Travellers aged 20–24 have completed at least upper-secondary education; this marks little change in comparison with 2016 (28%). In the general EU-27 population, this rate was 84% in both 2024 and 2018."

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



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

Segregation remains one of the most pervasive barriers to quality education in all six countries. Roma pupils are concentrated in schools with predominantly or exclusively Roma pupils, in separate classes within otherwise mixed schools, or in schools serving segregated residential areas. Segregation is **reinforced by residential patterns** (CZ, HU, RO, SK), non-Roma parental school choice and withdrawal of non-Roma pupils from schools attended by Roma children (BG, SK), and **institutional practices that perpetuate ethnic divisions**. Segregated schools frequently have poorer infrastructure or fewer resources (CZ, HU, RO, SK), fewer experienced teachers (HU), lower academic expectations (HU, RO, SK), and more limited learning opportunities (HU, RO, SK), making **nominal access to education very different from actual access** to quality and inclusive learning.

A particularly damaging form of segregation is the **disproportionate placement of Roma children in special education** (BG, CZ, HU, SK). Poverty and social disadvantage (CZ, SK), language differences or cultural bias (SK), and behavioural or developmental difficulties (HU) can be interpreted as special educational needs, placing children on educational tracks with **substantially reduced curricula and future opportunities** (CZ, HU, SK). In some cases, inadequate or delayed specialist assessment compounds the problem: children who need developmental support may not receive it, while others can be directed towards special classes without sufficient consideration of their actual abilities (HU). Once placed on these tracks, children face **restricted access to mainstream secondary education** and future employment (CZ, HU, SK).

A civil society case concerned two siblings in grades 8 and 6 who were assessed as having special educational needs (SEN) and placed in a SEN class. The older child, despite having stronger abilities, subsequently received very limited academic instruction and faced poor prospects for further education. When behavioural difficulties emerged in a third sibling, the family was also encouraged to consider SEN placement. After the civil society organisation advised waiting, the child was found to have good abilities and remained outside the SEN class. The case illustrates how assessment and placement decisions can unnecessarily restrict children's educational trajectories.

HUNGARY

Antigypsyism operates inside and outside education systems. Roma children encounter stereotypes, discriminatory treatment, racist bullying, verbal abuse, and assumptions about their abilities or family commitment. **Bullying and racism** from schoolmates are reported (BG, CZ, RO, SK), while all researchers agree that lower expectations, discriminatory attitudes, or **biased educational decisions by staff** limit children's progress. Such experiences damage confidence and belonging, weaken trust between parents and schools, and contribute to truancy, **disengagement from learning, and poorer performance** and outcomes (RO, SK, ES).

Educational outcomes are also shaped by the **material conditions in which children are expected to learn**. Overcrowded or unstable housing and lack of quiet study space impede homework and concentration (CZ, RO, SK, ES), while insufficient access to computers or reliable internet creates digital exclusion (CZ, ES). Many Roma **families struggle to afford school supplies**, educational materials, transport, or participation in extracurricular activities (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). In some households, **older children have caring responsibilities** for younger siblings (CZ, HU), and some older children also engage in income-generating activities, which affects school participation (BG, RO). The incompatibility of the mainstream education system with early **family formation or childcare responsibilities** can interrupt education, particularly for girls (BG, HU, RO, SK).

Roma **early school leaving and low secondary-school completion** are realities throughout the six countries. **Poverty and financial pressure contribute to dropout** in all of them, as do segregation and lower-quality schooling (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES), discrimination (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES), housing instability (RO, ES), family and caring duties (CZ, HU, SK), migration or mobility (BG), and insufficient educational support (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). Many Roma parents **cannot afford further studies**, or lack the information needed (CZ), while previous experiences of discrimination reduce expectations that education will translate into better prospects (CZ, ES). As a consequence, **many young Roma leave the education system** without completing upper secondary education, while very large shares are subsequently neither employed nor in education or training (BG, HU, RO, ES). Lower qualifications then **reduce access to good employment and adequate income**, reproducing the same material disadvantages that affected children's education in the first place.

"Many Roma children are highly motivated to learn, but poverty, lack of study space at home, and irregular attendance make it difficult for them to keep up with their peers. Some children miss school because they lack transportation, adequate clothing, or family support. Without additional educational and social support, many eventually disengage from school."

ROMA SCHOOL MEDIATOR, ROMANIA

Roma parents are too often portrayed as lacking interest in their children's education, but the **real barriers lie with the system**. Parents may not have the necessary information (CZ), be unable to finance further education (CZ), face transport and service barriers (BG, RO, SK), or be faced with discrimination within educational settings themselves (CZ, RO, ES). Effective support therefore requires **sustained work with families**, Roma school and educational mediators, accessible information, tutoring and mentoring, scholarships, school meals, transport support, digital access and assistance with school-related costs. Such measures exist to varying degrees in all countries, but frequently **fail to reach all children who need them**.

Kumpania, implemented in the Valencian Community, provides sustained socio-educational support to Roma children and young people while working simultaneously with families and schools. It combines academic reinforcement, individual guidance, psychological and social support and family intervention, with Impulsa Kumpania additionally supporting early schooling. The programme aims to strengthen enrolment and continuity, completion of compulsory secondary education and progression into post-compulsory studies, and was highlighted as a promising development in the European Commission's 2024 assessment of national Roma frameworks.

SPAIN

Education can also **intersect directly with child protection and family separation**. In Bulgaria, school absences are identified among poverty-related factors that can contribute to child-protection intervention, while **linking child benefits to school attendance only makes the situation of families harder**. In Czechia, school attendance is compulsory from the to the 1st to the 9th grade, with compulsory attendance extended to pre-school from 2017. In cases of long-term non-compliance with compulsory preschool attendance, the situation may be treated as a misdemeanour or as parental neglect.

In Spain, researchers warn that **absenteeism linked to poverty or housing instability should trigger support and mediation**, rather than punitive escalation towards child protection. Schools should, therefore, recognise when **poor attendance or performance is the result of poverty, antigypsyism, and persistent marginalisation,** and respond with support rather than punishment.

A family of five lives in a hostel. There are three children: Patrik, aged 5, Anna, aged 9, and Natálie, aged 15. The mother is raising them on her own because her partner is serving a prison sentence in connection with neglect of compulsory school attendance for Anna and Natálie. The latter dreams of becoming a pastry chef, but her mother's single income is insufficient for her to follow her dreams.

CZECHIA

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to ensure that Roma have **effective equal access to and can participate in all stages of education**, from early childhood education and childcare onwards, and specifically to ensure "**access to quality early childhood education and care** with special focus on **early inclusion of Roma children**", while preventing segregation, bullying and early school leaving.



Teo Georgiev for Fine Acts

Roma children and other services

Poverty, discrimination, territorial segregation, limited local provision outside urban centres, administrative complexity, and weak coordination between services mean that **support often fails to reach Roma children**, or is insufficient, or arrives too late. Transport, school meals, after-school activities, leisure and sports, digital access, counselling, and family support can make the difference between inclusion and exclusion, yet all six countries describe **significant gaps between entitlement and effective access**.

Public **transport is unaffordable for Roma families living in poverty** (CZ, RO, SK, ES), or the connections are **irregular or insufficient** (CZ, HU, SK), or it is simply unavailable where Roma children live (RO, SK). Existing transport schemes do not always reflect the reality of segregated neighbourhoods and remote settlements (BG), while children travelling outside their neighbourhood for school, specialist services, or activities face additional costs (ES). Inadequate transport solutions contribute to an inability to reach school, healthcare, and other services, break social isolation, and participate in activities. Among Roma children, younger ones and those with disabilities are particularly affected (SK).

A family with three children lived on the outskirts of the city, where buses were irregular and unreliable. Difficulties in getting the children to the available connections were affecting school attendance, and the family eventually came to the attention of the school, police, and child-protection services.

CZECHIA

For children in poverty, **access to food remains crucial**, as nearly one in three Roma children live in a household where someone went to bed hungry, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency. **Free or subsidised meals, school-based or otherwise,** are provided in Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain, but provision and Roma take-up remain problematic. Barriers include **schools not being integrated with the scheme** and parents not receiving clear information (CZ); provision being limited by municipal capacity (HU); **access being conditioned by attendance**, administrative requirements, lack of school canteens or associated costs such as transport and hygiene supplies (SK); and **digital applications** or documentation requirements (ES). For some Roma children living in severe poverty, **school lunch may be their most regular cooked meal** (SK).

Vanesa, a fourth-grade pupil living with her mother and four-year-old twin brothers, sometimes went to school without a snack or money for lunch because the family struggled financially. Through a free school-catering programme, she can now eat lunch regularly and concentrate better, while an NGO provided school supplies and a backpack. This support, however, is not equally available everywhere: some schools can draw on municipal or NGO assistance while others cannot.

CZECHIA

Counselling and family support are not easy to come by. Families need to travel outside excluded localities to obtain advice, and some counselling comes with fees (CZ). Staff shortages and overloaded services translate into **less individual support in disadvantaged areas** (HU, RO, SK), while there is not enough culturally sensitive counselling (RO). Families may also simply not know where to ask for help (CZ, RO), or may avoid public services because previous interactions have generated **mistrust, fear of judgement or experiences of discrimination** (CZ, RO). In Slovakia, shortages of school psycholo-

gists, special pedagogues and social professionals mean that learning difficulties, trauma or family stress are not recognised early, with children instead being labelled as "problematic". In Bulgaria, counselling and family-support services exist formally, but frequently fail to reach the most excluded Roma communities.

"Community-based support services can make a real difference in children's lives. When families have access to counselling, afterschool activities, parenting support, and social assistance, the risk of school dropout and family crisis decreases significantly. Unfortunately, many Roma communities still lack such services or rely exclusively on short-term NGO projects."

LOCAL NGO REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

Martina lived in a hostel with her seven children amid financial hardship, overcrowding, school difficulties, and growing family tensions. Although NGO field workers regularly visited the hostel, she initially avoided them because she feared being judged as an incapable mother and having her children removed. After encouragement from a neighbour, she sought help. The NGO then supported the family with housing, finances, school attendance, parenting and family communication. A crisis-intervention specialist and school psychologist were involved, while child-protection services cooperated with the family and NGO. The children gained greater stability and Martina gained a support network. The decisive first step was overcoming fear and distrust of services.

CZECHIA

Roma children are also **less likely to participate in after-school, leisure, cultural and sports activities**, even though these are central to healthy development, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging and validation. **Costs exclude children** from paid activities (CZ, ES), while transport barriers further reduce participation (CZ, SK, ES). In Czechia, families may be asked to pay club fees several months in advance, and some **Roma children additionally fear discrimination**. Bulgaria reports that extracurricular provision intended to reduce isolation and strengthen social and **cultural inclusion still fails to reach many** of the children who would benefit most. Community and after-school services exist in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, but their geographical coverage, staffing and funding remain uneven.

The Tanoda programmes provide community-based after-school tutoring, mentoring, meals and psychosocial support for disadvantaged children, many of them Roma. They are widely recognised as supporting school engagement and reducing educational disadvantage. Their funding has become somewhat more predictable through multi-year budget cycles and renewed national support, although geographical coverage and long-term sustainability remain uneven.

HUNGARY

The lack of integrated support means that **Roma parents are often expected to navigate multiple, separate administrative systems** on their own. They need to travel between institutions, produce documentation and submit digital applications (ES), and repeatedly explain the same family circumstances to unsympathetic interlocutors. Families in Czechia often **rely more heavily on NGOs than public institutions**, because of mistrust and lack of knowledge about where to seek assistance. **Mediation and coordinated services** therefore emerge as particularly effective approaches: rather than expecting a family to navigate multiple institutions alone, **one trusted family worker can connect them** with meals, transport, digital access, tutoring, counselling, benefits and other support (BG, CZ, RO, ES).

Unfortunately, local services may depend on municipal capacity (HU) or short-term NGO or project funding (RO), or may be formally available but insufficiently tailored to Roma communities (BG, SK). **Failure to provide early intervention** often leads to accumulated and compounding vulnerabilities, which **trigger the intervention of child protection services**. Romania reports that vulnerable families often receive intervention only after the situation has escalated into a crisis. In Czechia, **fear that asking for help might result in child removal** can itself delay access to support. Spain similarly stresses that stabilising a child's daily life through practical services can prevent poverty-related hardship from being interpreted as parental failure.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to support Roma children and their families not only in education, health and housing, but also through **access to social services, essential services, adequate nutrition and leisure activities**, while supporting children's participation in non-formal learning, **sport, cultural and other activities** promoting wellbeing and personal development.



Denitsa Boyadzhieva for Fine Acts

Support for Roma parents

There are no poor children in rich families, which is why supporting Roma parents (and other caregivers) is fundamental to reducing child poverty and improving children's wellbeing. **Parents' ability to provide a stable and supportive environment for their children depends on their own access** to quality employment, adequate income support, and a wide range of services. Yet, realities across the six countries consistently show that the **parents facing the greatest hardship are also those least well served** by existing support structures. Even when these exist, their adequacy, accessibility, and suitability to **respond to Roma families' actual needs and circumstances** remain major problems.

Formally, measures are available, but access to them is often hindered by lack of information, lack of documents, transport barriers, mistrust of institutions, discrimination and weak coordination between systems. Under the European Child Guarantee, multiple positive initiatives have been adopted, including free kindergartens and nurseries, free meals, support for vulnerable families with children, health services, social services, and measures for inclusion in education. The National Roma Inclusion Strategy also provides a significant number of measures for employment. However, monitoring of their implementation identifies serious structural problems.

BULGARIA

Social protection and income support schemes are essential sources of income, as cash transfers have been proven time and time again to be effective in reducing poverty, but they **frequently fail to provide adequate protection** for Roma families. The **amounts available are often insufficient** to cover essential expenditure such as food, housing, utilities, clothing, transport and school costs (BG, HU, RO, SK), while some support mechanisms **favour households with stable employment** and formal earnings, leaving parents in precarious or informal work at a disadvantage (HU, RO, SK, ES). The real value of family support has been significantly eroded over time (HU), while **changes to benefit design have resulted in substantial income losses** for vulnerable households (CZ). **Conditionality also aggravates hardship**: linking benefits to children's school attendance without addressing why children are absent only further impoverishes already vulnerable families (BG).

Sandra lives in a household with two adults and two minor children. Under the previous benefit system, the family received CZK 35 000 per month. Following reassessment under the new integrated "super-benefit", this fell to CZK 24 000, a net loss CZK 11 000, as her work bonus was zero and her partner was also unemployed.

CZECHIA

Formal entitlement does not guarantee effective access. Administrative complexity, lack of information or documentation, and difficult procedures prevent many Roma parents from obtaining support for which they are eligible (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Digital applications and limited digital skills** create additional obstacles (SK, ES), while **transport difficulties** can make offices and services physically inaccessible (BG, SK). Mistrust of institutions, discrimination, and poor communication with officials further **discourage families from seeking help** (BG, CZ). Many Roma parents need considerable assistance simply to navigate and understand their rights, to compile the needed documents, to complete applications, and to communicate with administrations.

Ms Silvia applied for the "super-benefit" and submitted three months of rent and utility documentation, but her application was rejected because her lease did not contain one required occupancy document. She had to restart the application process and approached an NGO for assistance to ensure that the second application succeeded.

CZECHIA

Antigypsyism in employment and labour market exclusion are also important drivers of family poverty, as Roma parents face restricted access to stable and decent employment throughout the countries covered by the research. **Temporary, insecure or informal work** is widespread (CZ, HU, RO, SK, ES), while **seasonal employment** (RO) and reliance on **self-employment** and street vending (ES) make **household income highly unpredictable** and weaken access to contributory social protection. Roma women face additional disadvantages, as they **disproportionately shoulder care responsibilities**, combined with weaker labour-market opportunities and discrimination (HU, SK, ES). **Over-indebtedness and wage garnishment** can make taking up formal employment financially difficult for families already experiencing hardship (CZ). Employment, therefore, **does not automatically provide a route out of poverty**, particularly where the work available is insecure, poorly paid, or incompatible with caring responsibilities.

"Most Roma parents want to work and provide for their children, but many can only find temporary or informal jobs. Without stable employment and accessible family support services, families remain trapped in poverty despite their efforts."

LOCAL ROMA NGO REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

Roma parents also experience **limited access to work-life balance policies**. Insufficient, inaccessible or unaffordable childcare **restricts parents' ability to enter or remain in employment** (CZ, HU, RO, SK, ES), with **Roma women particularly affected** by care responsibilities (HU, SK, ES). Employment-based or earnings-related family measures often **require stable formal employment histories** that many Roma parents do not have (HU, RO, SK, ES). Many Roma work in low-skilled and fixed-schedule occupations, where **flexible hours, part-time work, and remote working are difficult** or impossible (CZ). In Bulgaria, nurseries and kindergartens have been free since 2022, showing that **removing direct childcare costs can help**, but cost is only one barrier among many.

Effective parental support consequently **requires multidimensional, integrated responses**, combining income support, adequate housing and healthcare, accessible local services including quality childcare, assistance with employment, and decisive action against discrimination in all areas. Evidence also points to **the importance of individualised counselling**, mediation, employment and debt advice, parenting support, and practical assistance in accessing services (BG, CZ, HU, RO, ES). **Roma mediators, social and community workers and civil society organisations frequently act as a bridge** between families and institutions (BG, CZ, HU, ES). However, NGO and project-based provision **cannot substitute for functioning public systems**, as support may disappear when short-term projects end (CZ), and locally available civil society initiatives **cannot compensate for structural shortcomings** or inadequate geographical coverage (HU, RO).

A Roma parent moves between poverty, irregular employment, benefit applications, and caring responsibilities while trying to maintain school routines for several children. Missing an appointment or failing to submit a digital document can interrupt family income and quickly create rent or utility arrears. Community-based accompaniment can resolve the administrative problem early, help stabilise income, and prevent a family crisis.

SPAIN

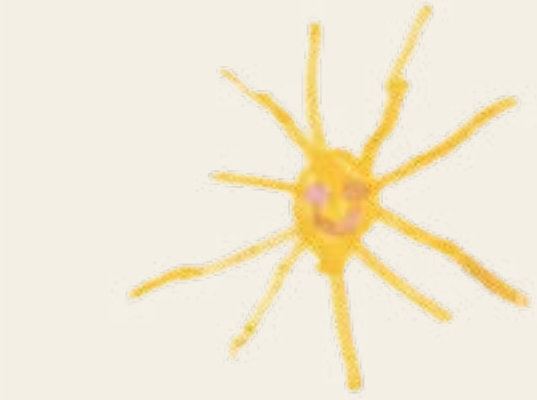
Ultimately, **supporting Roma parents is supporting Roma children**. When adults can access adequate income, employment, rights, and services, they are better able to **provide the conditions children need to thrive**. Conversely, poverty, unemployment, lack of services, rights violations, and antigypsyism **cause manageable difficulties to escalate into severe hardship** and deprivation for parents and children alike.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to **support Roma children and their families** across employment, social services, education, health, housing and essential services, while also encouraging "**effective parental involvement** in the education of Roma pupils", strengthening links between schools and communities through mediators and teaching assistants, and supporting financial literacy for families.

Roma children and antigypsyism

Antigypsyism affects Roma children across virtually every area of their lives. It is expressed through direct discrimination, racist insults, bullying and exclusion, but also through **institutional practices, segregation, lower expectations, stereotyping and curtailed access to rights and services**. Across the six countries, these different forms reinforce one another: poverty and exclusion increase children's exposure to discrimination, while antigypsyism itself **produces and reproduces disadvantage**, restricting access to quality education, adequate housing, healthcare, social protection and other opportunities. It is therefore both an additional barrier faced by Roma children and a **structural determinant of their living conditions and future prospects**.

Education is one of the clearest manifestations. School segregation, stereotypes about Roma children's abilities, lower expectations from teachers, and exclusion by peers are reported throughout the six countries. These experiences impede access to quality education and can shape children's educational trajectories from an early age. **Placement in special or segregated education** on the basis of discriminatory assumptions leads to further inequalities (HU, SK). Racially-motivated bullying and harassment are also widespread, while **schools fail to recognise or adequately respond** to such incidents (CZ, ES). The **absence of Roma history and culture** from mainstream curricula can further leave stereotypes unchallenged and reinforce prejudice (SK).



Although important progress has been made, many Roma children still encounter stereotypes and lower expectations within the education system. Antigypsyism often operates in subtle ways, influencing teachers' attitudes, children's educational trajectories, and families' trust in public institutions. Combating discrimination requires continuous training, monitoring, and active involvement of Roma communities."

INSPECTOR FOR ROMA EDUCATION, ROMANIA

Direct **discrimination and hostility shape children's everyday experience** of school and social life. Roma children experience racist insults, ridicule, stereotyping, social exclusion and verbal or physical bullying. These experiences can **damage school performance and participation** (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), undermine **self-esteem and mental wellbeing** (RO, SK, ES), and weaken children's **sense of belonging in wider society** (CZ, RO, SK, ES). When such scarring experiences are dismissed or left unaddressed, discrimination is compounded by the message that **Roma children cannot expect equal protection when they report it** (CZ, ES).

Two seven-year-old Roma twins were enrolled by their parents in a mainstream school because they wanted them to have access to higher-quality education. The children later began coming home with torn clothes and their school performance deteriorated. They eventually told their parents that classmates were taking their snacks and ridiculing them. When the parents raised the issue, the school maintained that there was no problem and believed that the family was fabricating the incidents.

CZECHIA

Another area in which Roma children feel the acute effects of antigypsyism is **housing, including spatial segregation.** Roma families encounter discrimination when looking for private or social housing (CZ, SK, ES), while **forced evictions and demolitions** without secure alternatives expose children to further instability and exclusion (BG). **Residential segregation physically isolates Roma children** from services, infrastructure and opportunities for contact with the majority population (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK). **Poor and segregated housing can consequently become normalised** as something Roma families are simply expected to endure, rather than treated as an inequality requiring public intervention (BG, HU).

Both parents in a Roma family are employed and care for three young children – Amanda (4 years old), Viktorie (6 years old), and Valerie (8 years old) – but the family has lived in a hostel for several years, in conditions affected by pests and inadequate space. With NGO support, the parents have repeatedly tried to find standard housing. Landlords have nevertheless repeatedly rejected them because of the number of children or stereotypes about Roma families, including assumptions that they will damage property, be unhygienic or noisy, or fail to pay rent. The parents do not understand society's negative approach towards their family, given that they strive to lead an orderly life, work, and endeavour to improve their life situation. The family remains in the hostel.

CZECHIA

Discrimination also affects effective access to healthcare and other public services (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES). Roma families report **disrespectful or prejudicial treatment** (RO, SK, ES), as well as **poorer service quality** (HU, SK) **and insufficient understanding** of how poverty and exclusion shape their circumstances (BG). In Spain alone, 399 cases of discrimination against Roma people were documented in 2024, including 25 in education, 45 in housing, 15 in health services, 35 in employment, and 82 in access to goods and services – and these are only the cases that were reported and assisted. Antigypsyism is so **widespread and deeply embedded** in institutional practices that Roma children receive differentiated treatment even in ordinary public spaces.

A municipality reportedly organised the use of a children's playground on different days for Roma and non-Roma children, effectively reproducing segregation in a space intended for children's play and social interaction.

SLOVAKIA

Repeated discrimination weakens trust in schools, healthcare, social services and public authorities, reducing families' willingness to seek support or challenge unfair treatment in all countries. Obstacles also include **limited legal awareness** and complex administrative procedures (HU), as well as **fear of retaliation** and the expectation that **reporting discrimination will change nothing** (ES). Civil society organisations and Roma mediators frequently play an essential role in **helping families identify discrimination and navigate complaints** or legal procedures (HU, ES). However, responsibility cannot rest on Roma families themselves, or on these informal supports. Public authorities and service providers **must receive thorough anti-bias training** to be able to avoid and recognise antigypsyism not only when it is overt, but also when it is **embedded in institutional routines**, discretionary outcomes, and supposedly neutral practices.

Negative assumptions rooted in antigypsyism influence how poverty and family circumstances are weaponised by social and child protection systems. Material deprivation, overcrowded housing and other consequences of structural poverty can be **seen as evidence of deficient parenting**, rather than as grounds for providing support (BG, HU, RO, ES). Bias can consequently affect the assessments of Roma parents by these services, and their capacity to care for their children (BG, CZ, HU, RO, ES). At the same time, **poor living conditions or harm are perceived as somehow normal** in Roma communities and hence go unaddressed (HU). **Antigypsyism creates a double standard** in which Roma families are scrutinised for poverty, while simultaneously receiving insufficient protection from actual harm.

Persistent experiences of **stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination accumulate during childhood** and severely prejudice children in multiple and mutually reinforcing ways. Examples include **undermining educational motivation**, participation and achievement (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES), **damaging mental wellbeing** and self-esteem (RO, SK, ES), and **weakening children's sense of belonging** and expectations of wider society (CZ, RO, SK, ES). Experiences of discrimination encountered by parents can also shape **how children understand their own prospects and place** in society (CZ).

Combating antigypsyism consequently requires **systemic action across every area** affecting Roma children: **desegregating** education and housing, **confronting stereotypes** and racist bullying, **enforcing equal treatment** in healthcare and services, **preventing family separation**, providing **comprehensive recourse**, and **training professionals** to recognise institutional and personal bias. Roma children, parents and **communities must also be meaningfully involved** in shaping these responses.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to fight "**multiple and structural discrimination** against Roma and, in particular, against [...] Roma children", while recognising that combating discrimination **is inseparable from tackling social and economic exclusion**. It also calls for awareness-raising among civil servants and other stakeholders to identify and combat antigypsyism and its consequences.



Jacopo Oliveri - Fatomale for OBI x Fine Acts

Prevention of family separation

While there is consensus across the inputs from the six countries covered by this report that housing deprivation, social exclusion, and **poverty should never be grounds for separating children from their families**, research paints a different picture of realities on the ground. Material hardship and living conditions are often part of child protection assessments, as they should be, but they are commonly **instrumentalised as deficient parenting or negligence**. These risks are **compounded by widespread, deep-seated antigypsyism**, which shapes how social workers interpret Roma family life, parenting practices, and material circumstances. As a result, structural deprivation can be transformed into an **indictment of parental inadequacy**, instead of triggering wrap-around supportive interventions for the family in need.

The precise scale of Roma family separation is difficult to establish because **ethnicity-disaggregated child-protection data are missing or inadequate** (BG, HU, SK, ES). This makes it difficult to measure disproportionality and to identify where discriminatory patterns are present. Nevertheless, solid research and civil society evidence point to Roma children being **disproportionately represented in institutional, residential, or alternative care** (CZ, HU, SK). At the same time, poverty, inadequate housing, indebtedness, and limited access to services are repeatedly identified among the circumstances bringing Roma families into contact with child protection systems.

In Bulgaria, around 8 500 children live outside their biological families under child-protection measures, and nearly 2 000 children enter alternative care each year. In Hungary, around 19 000 children live in long-term care, while approximately 21 000 enter the child-protection system annually. In Czechia, residential facilities are under severe pressure: during one recent period, authorities needed placements for 183 children while only 58 places were available.

Legal and policy frameworks increasingly recognise that **keeping children within their families should be the priority.** Poverty alone is **explicitly excluded as a lawful basis for removal** in some countries (CZ, HU, SK), while family preservation is formally prioritised in others (BG). Several countries are also moving away from institutional care towards **family- and community-based alternatives** (BG, CZ, RO, SK), including kinship care and foster care. However, the existence of legal safeguards **does not prevent poverty-related circumstances from influencing child-protection** decisions in practice. When support and services are not readily available, are inadequate, or are not timely, **families can reach crisis point** before help arrives.

The research consistently points to the **importance of early intervention and prevention**, including social work, counselling, income and housing support, debt advice, healthcare, assistance with documents and benefits, parenting support, school mediation and regular home-based outreach. Yet, in practice, **preventive services remain insufficient,** fragmented, overstretched or geographically unavailable throughout the six countries, meaning that child protection responses are often triggered **only after problems have accumulated** and become untenable. Emergency placement can become the response to unresolved family difficulties (BG), while support services are plagued by **limited staffing and capacity** (CZ, HU). In Czechia, for example, one field worker may be responsible for around **15 families**, severely limiting the intensity of support that can be provided. Provision remains **highly uneven in marginalised communities** (RO, SK), and support can be **piecemeal or activated too late** (ES).

Integrated, timely and community-based interventions are instrumental for **keeping families together**. This requires **coordinated work between multiple actors**, including social services, schools, healthcare, housing support and child protection systems (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), while Roma mediators and community-based organisations are particularly important for building trust and ensuring that families remain engaged (BG, RO,

ES). Promising examples include **multidisciplinary support teams**, such as the "one family, one plan, one coordinator" model, preventing families from having to navigate multiple institutions alone (BG), or bringing together social services, schools, health providers, educational and health mediators, and Roma organisations (RO, ES).

> *"In many cases, families do not need separation; they need support. When parents receive counselling, social assistance, housing support, and regular outreach services, most children can safely remain with their families. Prevention should always come before removal."*
>
> LOCAL ROMA NGO REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

When preventive support fails, **removal itself can generate further harm**. There are significant **shortages of foster carers** and **insufficient alternative care places** (CZ, HU), and many residential facilities are **overcrowded** (CZ). In Hungary, around 2 000 foster parents are estimated to be missing, while the number of foster families caring for six or more children increased by 71% between 2012 and 2022. Where removal has already taken place, **reunification can be hindered** by **demanding conditions imposed on parents without corr esponding practical support**, including requirements to secure formal employment or to rapidly improve housing conditions (HU). Family preservation should not only prevent unnecessary removal, but also **actively support reunification**, as the goal continues to be for families to stay together.

A Roma mother experiencing repeated domestic violence sought help so that she could rebuild her life with her children. Child protection authorities had already decided that the children should enter care, but the decision could not be implemented for six months because no foster placements were available. Following a later violent incident, the children were removed as an emergency measure, and the siblings were separated across three different placements. Earlier and better-coordinated intervention could have reduced both the risks faced by the family and the additional trauma caused by the eventual emergency response.

HUNGARY

Family-based arrangements are particularly important when children temporarily cannot remain with their parents, but this **should not absolve the state of its responsibility** to support both the parents and the temporary carers. Such arrangements are **considered preferable to institutional placement** (BG, CZ, SK, ES), as they allow children to remain within their extended family and to preserve important relationships. They can also **maintain cultural and family continuity** and **facilitate later reunification**, while giving parents time to address the circumstances that made temporary alternative care necessary (CZ, SK).

In Kuklov, a family member took over the care of his aunt's child when she was unable to provide adequate care. The arrangement allowed the child to remain within the extended family network and preserve family ties, while leaving open the possibility for the biological parents to rebuild their relationship with the child if their circumstances improved. Another mother battling drug addiction feared that her two children would enter institutional care. She and her own mother jointly asked the court to place the children temporarily with their grandmother while she underwent treatment. After the mother successfully completed treatment, the children returned to her household.

SLOVAKIA

Across all six countries, poverty, inadequate housing and other consequences of structural exclusion significantly **influence evaluations of parental capacity** and increase Roma families' exposure to child protection intervention. Roma families may also experience **intensified institutional scrutiny** when poverty, housing instability, school absence and administrative difficulties accumulate (ES). These dynamics are **not exclusive to Roma families**. Poverty, insecure housing, social exclusion, language barriers and other forms of marginalisation can similarly increase institutional scrutiny of **other disadvantaged or racialised families** (CZ, RO, ES). Roma families, however, face the additional and specific burden of **antigypsyism**, through which material hardship can be seen through the lens of **entrenched cultural stereotypes** concerning parenting, hygiene, education, housing and family organisation.

Effective protection of the family unit **hinges primarily on access to adequate income and housing** in all six countries, followed by accessible healthcare and childcare, but also social work, parenting support, practical assistance in accessing benefits (BG, RO, ES), and debt counselling (CZ). Preventing discriminatory separation requires **individualised assessments that clearly distinguish** structural deprivation from actual abuse or neglect, while recognising the impact of **antigypsyism as a root cause of many of the structural disadvantages** families face, as well as a **key driver of institutional decision-making** regarding the future of their children.

Child-protection systems also need **adequate staffing with appropriate training**, so that professionals neither **misinterpret poverty and exclusion** as parental fault nor overlook **the historical circumstances that produced the hardship** and marginalisation in the first place. Keeping children safe cannot mean removing them because their parents are poor, inadequately housed or unable to overcome structural barriers without support. The appropriate response to poverty is to **strengthen the family, not to break it apart**. Preventing unnecessary family separation also requires **institutional responsibility, adequate funding, measurable indicators and effective monitoring**, as family preservation requires timely, practical support (BG, RO, ES).

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to ensure access to **community- and family-based services for children deprived of parental care** and explicitly to "**prevent institutionalisation** and promote a shift from institutional to community, family-based care", including by **providing support to families in precarious situations** through advisory services, financial support, food aid, assisted housing and development services.

Participation and justice for Roma children

Across all six countries, **Roma children's participation is constrained** by overlapping barriers including poverty, segregation, discrimination, low institutional trust, and unequal access to education. Participation is **particularly weak where children grow up in segregated settings** and have few opportunities to engage with institutions outside their immediate environment.

While reliable ethnicity-disaggregated information on participation is itself lacking (BG, HU), available evidence points to **limited participation in decision-making structures** such as student councils, school parliaments, school boards, municipal children's bodies, and other similar entities (CZ, HU, RO, SK, ES). Segregated schools provide particularly **weak environments for meaningful participation**, as student councils may exist but have little influence or participation remains largely formal (BG, HU, SK). Discrimination and **low institutional trust** reduce participation in school decision-making (HU, RO, SK), while **low self-confidence and limited encouragement** further discourage leadership (RO, SK). **Early school leaving** and limited progression through education reduce opportunities to participate in school and student governance over time (CZ, HU, ES).

At a low-threshold centre operated by Life Together, a children's parliament allows children and adolescents to participate directly in running the facility. They propose ideas, help decide the programme, rules and activities, and take part in shaping the environment in which they spend time. The initiative gives children practical experience of expressing their views, negotiating with others and participating in collective decision-making. Roma children also participate, but they are underrepresented because they attend secondary schools and universities at lower rates than children from the majority population.

CZECHIA

"When Roma children are encouraged to express their views and participate in decision-making, they become more confident and engaged in school and community life. However, many still need supportive environments where their voices are genuinely heard and valued."

LOCAL ROMA YOUTH ORGANISATION REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

Poverty and lack of resources also **constrain participation outside of decision-making structures**, such as school activities, sports, cultural associations, youth organisations and community initiatives (CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Difficulties around transport, family resources and the availability of activities locally** create additional barriers for children living in segregated or marginalised communities (SK). **Lack of information** about available opportunities can further exclude children and families (CZ, ES). At the same time, civil society initiatives demonstrate that **Roma children and young people participate** when they are given meaningful, supportive spaces and their leadership is taken seriously (CZ, RO, SK, ES). Youth clubs, peer education, mentoring, children's parliaments and community projects can **strengthen confidence, civic skills, awareness of rights** and the ability to formulate and defend views. However, many such initiatives remain project-based or dependent on civil society, rather than embedded sustainably in public institutions (CZ, RO).

The municipal Youth Centre in Jarovnice is led directly by Roma young people, who have a genuine role in deciding its priorities, direction and activities. The initiative has contributed to increased self-confidence, social capital and civic participation, while giving young Roma practical experience of leadership and responsibility within their community.

SLOVAKIA

Meaningful participation is closely connected to **access to justice**. Children cannot defend rights that they do not know they have, and Roma children and their families face **limited legal literacy** and **insufficient awareness** of complaint mechanisms and available remedies (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK). Distrust of institutions and previous experiences of discrimination further **discourage families from seeking redress** across all six countries. Other barriers include poor access to legal assistance (CZ, RO, SK, ES), complex administrative or institutional procedures (BG, HU, RO, ES), geographical isolation from specialised support (RO), language difficulties and fear of sanctions (BG), and fear of retaliation or the expectation that reporting discrimination will achieve nothing (ES). **Children may also depend heavily on adults** to recognise a violation and initiate procedures on their behalf (HU).

Since April 2026, Czechia has had its first dedicated Children's Ombudsman, with a mandate to monitor implementation of children's rights, receive complaints and submissions from children and adults, identify systemic shortcomings and advocate for improvements affecting children and adolescents.

CZECHIA

Child-friendly justice systems remain unevenly developed. Procedures and institutions need to **recognise children's age, vulnerability and experiences of trauma**, while information and remedies need to be understandable and physically accessible. **Specialised child-friendly facilities** have been introduced (BG), while independent mechanisms specifically dedicated to children's rights have recently been strengthened (CZ). Yet gaps remain in specialised professionals, legal support and accessible complaints procedures (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES).

Since 2008, the so-called "blue rooms" have been created, dedicated spaces where child victims or witnesses of violence can be heard in a more appropriate environment. However, the wider justice system still lacks specialised juvenile courts and sufficient numbers of investigators, prosecutors and judges trained to work with children, illustrating how individual child-friendly measures do not by themselves create a fully accessible system.

BULGARIA

Access to justice is particularly important because many of the inequalities experienced by Roma children are **structural rather than isolated incidents**. Discrimination affects all areas, including education, housing, public services, policing, or child protection, meaning that **ordinary complaints procedures are often insufficient without specialised support**.

Civil society organisations consequently play a substantial role in legal assistance, advocacy, accompanying families through procedures and challenging discrimination (CZ, HU, SK, ES), while Roma mediators and specialised equality or victim-support bodies can help **bridge the gap between communities and institutions** (BG, ES). These supports are important, but access to rights cannot depend on whether a family happens to be connected to an NGO.

The 2007 D. H. and Others v. Czechia judgment concerned 18 Roma children from Ostrava who had been disproportionately placed in "special schools" intended for children with mild mental disabilities. The European Court of Human Rights found discrimination in conjunction with the right to education, including because assessment procedures failed to account adequately for linguistic, cultural and social differences. The judgment became a landmark for Roma children's rights, yet segregation and disproportionate placement in special education continue to be reported.

CZECHIA

Participation is particularly crucial in child protection court proceedings, where **decisions can determine whether children remain with their families** and where they live (ES). Children's views need to be heard in an **age-appropriate, safe, and genuinely influential way**, and families need to understand proceedings and have **access to representation**. For Roma children, this also requires **safeguards against antigypsyism**, as well as access to trusted mediators or community organisations where needed (ES). Roma children need **inclusive schools and communities in which their voices carry weight**, accessible information about their rights, safe complaint channels, affordable legal support and institutions capable of recognising discrimination and acting on it. Public authorities must also **proactively reach children who are least connected** to institutions, rather than designing participation around those already best placed to take part.

The **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** calls on Member States to step up the **"meaningful participation by and consultation** of Roma people, **including women, children, young people"**, while supporting active citizenship, strengthening Roma civil society and raising awareness of human and citizens' rights among disadvantaged Roma communities. It also calls for a "**comprehensive system of support for victims**" and assistance to Roma victims of hate crimes and discrimination.



Roma children in the National Roma Strategic Frameworks

In 2020, the European Union adopted a **Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation**, which includes three sub-targets:

- **to cut the poverty gap between Roma children and other children by at least half**, ensuring the majority of Roma children escape poverty by 2030.
- **to cut the gap in participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) by at least half,** ensuring that at least 70% of Roma children participate in pre-school by 2030.
- to **cut at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools**, ensuring that less than one in five Roma child attend schools where most or all children are Roma by 2030.

Western Balkan countries also committed to the implementation, and the European Union has supported their progressive alignment to the objectives. Governments from EU Member States and candidate countries alike were hence invited to develop **National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs)**. Additionally, the **Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation** contains a broad range of provisions **specifically relevant to Roma children**, which have been quoted separately in the previous chapters of this report.

On 25 September 2024, the **European Commission** released an implementation report **of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks**, assessing their implementation and their suitability for achieving progress towards the 2030 targets. The report finds **some progress in measures directly affecting Roma children**, particularly through early-childhood support, improved access to healthcare, prevention of school dropout, and more integrated services for disadvantaged families. It also **notes efforts to address intersectional discrimination** and **involve Roma civil society** more closely. Several of the **promising examples included were also flagged by our national research**, notably **Sure Start** Children Centres for children under three (HU), **day-care centres** for children at risk of family separation (RO), and **Kumpania**'s tailored socio-educational support for Roma young people and families (ES).

However, despite some promising initiatives for Roma children, the Commission finds that **progress remains slow** and measures are too often project-based rather than systemic. It calls for **stronger action** to ensure **access to quality, inclusive education** and prevent early school leaving, improve **health literacy and immunisation**, expand health mediation and **anti-discrimination awareness** among health and social professionals, and provide **greater resources for young Roma** to participate in decision-making. The report also highlights the need to address the wider **living conditions that shape children's outcomes**, notably segregation and inadequate access to essential services.

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

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The National Roma Strategic Frameworks are also being **evaluated by civil society**, as part of the Roma Civil Monitoring 2021-2025 project, funded by the European Commission and implemented by a consortium comprising 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 2025 and are available on the project website, and **each report also features a section on education**. The synthesis of the assessment reports identifies the following **missing dimensions from National Roma Strategic Frameworks, concerning children**: explicit and sufficiently developed **child protection measures**; prevention of **family separation caused by poverty**; adequate **early-intervention and family-support services**; safeguards against **antigypsyism and discriminatory assessments** in child protection; stronger **family-based alternatives to institutional care**, including preservation of sibling unity and cultural identity; systematic **reunification support**; comprehensive prevention of **early and forced marriage**; and reliable, **disaggregated data and monitoring** of outcomes for Roma children.

The findings above are **mirrored by the findings of the national research** underpinning this report. All six National Roma Strategic Frameworks contain measures relevant to Roma children, but **the level of ambition and commitment to a children's rights approach varies considerably**. Roma children are **explicitly recognised as a priority group in some National Roma Frameworks** (RO, ES), while elsewhere their needs are **addressed mainly through broader priorities**, such as education, poverty reduction, health, housing, social inclusion and anti-discrimination (BG, HU, SK). The Czech framework contains a substantial set of child-relevant measures, particularly around education, desegregation, social inclusion, and youth participation. Across the countries, however, Roma children are still too often **approached through individual policy sectors rather than through an integrated understanding** of child wellbeing and rights.

Education is the most developed child-related dimension in the National Roma Frameworks. All six address **persistent educational inequalities** affecting Roma children, including segregation and impaired access to quality education. Common priorities include **reducing school segregation** and promoting inclusive education across all six countries, **early childhood and pre-school participation** (BG, CZ, HU, RO, ES), and **preventing early school leavi**ng and improving educational attainment (BG, CZ, HU, RO, ES). Proposed measures towards these objectives are varied, covering **teaching assistants and support** professions (CZ), **school mediation** and second-chance programmes (RO), **cooperation between schools and families** (BG, CZ), and links with the **European Child Guarantee** and educational success measures (ES).

"The National Roma Strategy provides an important policy framework for improving the educational inclusion of Roma children. However, the effectiveness of these measures largely depends on their implementation at local level. Many schools serving marginalised Roma communities still lack adequate resources, support staff, and integrated services. Greater investment in early childhood education, school mediation, and family support is essential to reduce educational inequalities and prevent school dropout among Roma children."

INSPECTOR FOR ROMA EDUCATION, ROMANIA

Child poverty is recognised, but this acknowledgement **does not always translate into concrete measures** and policies that would tackle it. The Czech framework addresses child poverty relatively explicitly alongside educational disparities. Elsewhere, poverty affecting Roma children is often **approached through broader poverty or social-inclusion measures**, rather than through dedicated measures for Roma children (BG, HU, SK). Specific quantitative targets or sufficiently robust **child-focused indicators are also lacking** (RO, SK, ES), while broader objectives may be formulated **without clear accountability mechanisms** (BG, HU, RO, ES).

The connection between poverty, housing deprivation, and **the prevention of family separation remains particularly underdeveloped** in most National Roma Frameworks (BG, RO, ES). Early intervention and support for vulnerable families are recognised as priorities (SK), but weak child-specific targets and uneven implementation limit their potential impact. **Antigypsyism and discrimination are recognised to varying degrees** (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES), but are not consistently mainstreamed through every policy area that impacts children's wellbeing (ES).

Across all six countries, the **main weakness is implementation**. The National Roma Frameworks **broadly identify the right challenges**, but **commitments are repeatedly undermined** by insufficient or unstable funding, weak or insufficiently measurable indicators, and inadequate coordination of territorial implementation (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Insufficient or insecure funding** leads to **dependence on short-term project financing** (CZ). In some contexts, local political commitment is also identified as a barrier (HU). The result is that **ambitious national objectives do not consistently translate into improved outcomes** for Roma children.

Participation of Roma children and young people is formally promoted in some National Roma Frameworks (CZ, ES), but mechanisms allowing them to directly influence policies affecting them remain weak or underdeveloped (BG, SK). **Roma civil society likewise needs a stronger role** not only in consultation but also in **implementation, monitoring, and evaluation** (BG, HU, RO, ES). Better coordination between national, regional and municipal frameworks is also needed to **ensure that policies reach children locally.**



Anna Nikolova for Fine Acts

Roma children in the Child Guarantee – National Action Plans

The **European Child Guarantee**, adopted on 14 June 2021, is the European Union's **main instrument for tackling child poverty** and social exclusion and for implementing Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It calls on Member States to guarantee children in need **free and effective access to early childhood education and care**, education and school-based activities, healthcare, and at least **one healthy meal each school day**, as well as effective access to **healthy nutrition and adequate housing**. Six groups of children in need are identified for particular attention, including children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, **particularly Roma**, alongside children experiencing homelessness or severe housing deprivation, children with disabilities or mental health problems, children in alternative care, and children in precarious family situations. Member States were required to appoint national Child Guarantee Coordinators and **adopt National Action Plans** with measures until 2030, with progress reported every two years.

The **explicit inclusion of Roma children is very positive** and represents an important recognition of their disproportionate exposure to poverty and exclusion. However, **antigypsyism, segregation and discrimination were insufficiently mainstreamed**, and the Child Guarantee needs much stronger links with the EU Roma Strategic Framework. Implementation has since confirmed those concerns. The European Commission's 2026 review of the Child Guarantee implementation similarly points to **uneven and still insufficient delivery for Roma children**, who remain particularly affected by **gaps in effective access to services**, such as education (CZ, SK). The review calls for **more targeted action for marginalised children**, stronger family support and **prevention of family separation**, better **integration of services**, sustained **funding**, and robust monitoring using **disaggregated data**.

> *"The lowest levels of implementation of the provision of effective and free access to high-quality education for all children in need can be observed in Czechia and Slovakia. In both countries, the gaps concern above all Roma children."*
>
> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2026

Concerning the countries covered by this report, **all six National Action Plans contain measures relevant to Roma children**, who are explicitly recognised as a **priority or vulnerable group in four of them** (BG, RO, SK, ES), while they are **subsumed under broader categories** such as children in poverty, disadvantaged children, or children living in socially excluded localities in the other two (CZ, HU). However, **explicit recognition does not necessarily translate into targeted provision**, as Roma children may still be expected to benefit mainly through general measures for children in need (BG), while broader social inclusion policies are similarly expected to reach them indirectly (CZ, HU). This obscures the **specific barriers created by antigypsyism**.

Early childhood education and care, education and healthy nutrition feature across all six, while healthcare and housing are explicitly covered in most plans (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). Social work, child benefits, and **parenting or family support are also included** throughout the six countries, albeit to varying degrees. Measures range from **health and educational mediators**, **desegregation** and intercultural education (BG), **teaching assistants** and closer cooperation between schools, social services and families (CZ), and strengthened **child-welfare services** (HU), to **integrated community services** and multidisciplinary support (RO, SK) and socio-educational, housing, health-promotion and parenting support (ES).

However, across all six countries, **relevant measures on paper remain insufficient** for the scale and complexity of Roma children's disadvantages. **General approaches remain dominant** to the detriment of Roma-targeted ones (BG, CZ, HU), while explicit prioritisation has still not produced sufficiently ambitious or comprehensive interventions (RO, SK, ES). Problems include **inadequate reach into the poorest and most segregated communities** (BG, RO), insufficient preschool capacity and support professions (CZ), continuing **gaps in basic and specialist childcare provision** (HU), **insufficient attention to structural barriers** despite improved service access (SK), and **measures that remain too weak** compared with the severity of Roma child poverty (ES).

A targeted programme launched in 2019 and implemented by the Maltese Charity Service in the 300 most disadvantaged localities focused on social policy development and childcare. However, the national research concludes that it failed to provide the full range of childcare services needed in settlements inhabited predominantly by Roma children, illustrating the limits of targeted programmes when basic and specialist childcare provision remains insufficient.

HUNGARY

Intersectional discrimination and antigypsyism remain insufficiently integrated into the implementation of the Child Guarantee through the National Action Plans. **Educational and residential segregation** require stronger responses (CZ, HU, SK, ES), while **structural antigypsyism is insufficiently addressed** (BG, HU, RO, SK). The Plans cannot focus on improving access to services without adequately confronting **the most significant barrier to access**. Even where discriminatory practices, bullying and cultural barriers are recognised, **antigypsyism is not always explicitly addressed** as a specific form of racism, with dedicated measures, responsibilities and monitoring (BG).

Family support is present in all six National Action Plans, with measures such as **early intervention**, counselling and preventive social services (BG), **integrated community services** (RO, SK), and housing support (ES). However, missing dimensions include **more social work with families,** more effective support for households at risk of poverty, and a **systematic response to housing distress** (CZ), as well as **strengthening the wider child-welfare** and child-protection system (HU). Equally, the connection between these measures and **preventing family crisis and unnecessary separation** remains much less developed than the broader objective of improving access to services. Roma child poverty **cannot be separated from the circumstances of parents**, which requires **stable financing for organisations working directly with vulnerable families**, better public understanding of child poverty, and **breaking intergenerational poverty** (CZ).

A particularly consistent weakness across all six countries is **monitoring and accountability**. Roma-specific or sufficiently **disaggregated indicators and data remain inadequate** (BG, RO, SK, ES), while measurable targets, implementation responsibilities, timelines or **evaluation mechanisms are insufficient** (CZ, HU, RO, ES). This makes it difficult to establish **whether Roma children actually receive the services formally available** to them and whether these improve their outcomes. **Adequate and sustainable funding is also a concern**, whether through **missing dedicated budgets** and sustainable local financing (BG), **unstable financing** for essential support professionals and services (CZ), wider **underfunding** of child protection provision (HU), reliance on **insufficient and project-based financing** (RO), or the need for **more sustainable local and targeted provision** (SK, ES). Local implementation capacity also needs strengthening (BG, RO, SK).

"The Child Guarantee offers an important opportunity to improve the lives of Roma children, particularly those living in marginalised communities. However, policies alone are not enough. Without adequate funding, strong local implementation mechanisms, and meaningful involvement of Roma communities in decision-making processes, many vulnerable children will continue to be left behind."

ROMA CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVE, ROMANIA

Participation in Child Guarantee **governance also remains weak**, with sustained and structured involvement of Roma parents, children, mediators and their civil society organisations **insufficiently supported** (BG, HU, RO, SK, ES). Roma children themselves need **greater involvement beyond consultations**, through **codified participation** in governance (BG, SK), while **Roma organisations need to be involved much more closely** in the implementation and monitoring of measures concerning Roma children (HU, RO, ES). A dedicated **Roma consultative body for Child Guarantee implementation** has also been proposed as a possible way to strengthen accountability and participation (BG).

These – and other – implementation gaps prompted the European Commission's May 2026 communication on the strengthening of the European Child Guarantee, which also **announces a dedicated Guidance on Roma children**, bringing together outreach, mediation, inclusive education, family support and community-based interventions. The Guidance **must put antigypsyism at its core**, and **connect the national implementation of the European Child Guarantee with the EU and National Roma Frameworks**, particularly the aforementioned three targets concerning Roma children. This strong link must be operationalised through **enhanced cooperation between National Roma Contact Points and National Child Guarantee Coordinators**, strengthened and resourced **Roma mediators**, clear and **secure budgets** (including through EU funds), **disaggregated data** and Roma indicators, as well as the **meaningful participation** of Roma children, their parents, and the civil society organisations representing them.



Izabela Markova for Fine Acts

CONCLUSIONS

In all six countries reviewed by this report, **Roma child poverty is structural and multidimensional**, experienced not only as a lack of income, but also through inadequate and insecure housing, food and material deprivation, restricted access to education and healthcare, constrained access to other services, intersectional discrimination, and limited participation. These **disadvantages reinforce one another and are transmitted across generations**, while **antigypsyism remains a cross-cutting driver of exclusion**, shaping access to rights, resources, and opportunities. Roma children living in **marginalised and segregated communities face particularly severe disadvantages** (HU, SK), but the findings also underline that **Roma communities and families are diverse**, and standardised institutional responses can fail to reflect their different circumstances, needs, and social and cultural realities (RO).

Encouraging progress can be seen in certain areas, including community-based and outreach services, mediation, family support programmes, early intervention, efforts towards deinstitutionalisation, and Roma children's and young people's participation (BG, CZ, RO, SK, ES). **Early and sustained support demonstrably improves children's outcomes**, particularly when it combines individualised assistance, access to housing and education, parental support, and cooperation between actors (CZ). National Roma Frameworks broadly recognise the challenges, but **implementation continues to be marred** by fragmented provision, inadequate or unstable funding, short-term projects, insufficient local capacity, weak monitoring, and a **lack of measurable Roma-specific outcomes** (BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK). In some contexts, extensive policy frameworks have existed for decades without producing commensurate improvements in families' lived realities (CZ).

A central conclusion of this report is that **family separation must be understood in the context of accumulated vulnerabilities**. Poverty, dire living and housing conditions, poor access to services, discrimination, and insufficient support can gradually **push families towards crisis**. However, crucially, structural hardship **should not be viewed as parents failing or being negligent**, but instead should trigger comprehensive support for them and for the family unit (BG, RO, ES). **Punitive institutional responses compound the problem**: school truancy turns into sanctions against parents and subsequent alternative care for children (CZ), while Roma children remain disproportionately represented in child protection systems (HU). The priority must be **to prevent family difficulties from resulting in unnecessary separation** (ES).

To break this cycle, the next phase of Roma inclusion and child poverty policies must **support Roma families and their children** through adequate income, secure housing, quality employment, accessible quality services, and the consistent fight against antigypsyism in all these areas and in all aspects of life (CZ, RO). Bureaucratic complexity and the attitudes of public officials can themselves determine whether support succeeds or fails (CZ). **Roma families must be treated as rights-holders** and partners, and **Roma children must be heard** in decisions affecting them (RO, ES), if we are to ensure that every Roma child can grow up free from poverty and discrimination, supported within their family and community.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

BULGARIA

- **Introduce specific national and local indicators for Roma children** in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and the Roma Strategic Framework, while respecting personal data protection standards.
- **Ensure that poverty, homelessness, or poor living conditions are not used in themselves as grounds for separating a child** from their family.
- **Introduce a mandatory early prevention model: "one family, one plan, one coordinator",** with the involvement of social workers, health and educational mediators, schools, kindergartens, and health services.
- **Expand mobile and home-based services** for pregnant women, families with children aged 0 to 3, and families in extreme poverty, including prenatal care, early childhood development, nutrition, parenting support, and referral to services.
- **Ensure real access of Roma children to early childhood education** through free services, transport, work with parents, mediators, and support for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.
- **Take concrete measures for educational desegregation**, including monitoring segregated classes, supporting mixed schools, providing additional learning support, and working with non-Roma parents.
- **Establish municipal housing programmes for families with children**, including legalisation, infrastructure, social housing, and a ban on forced evictions without alternative accommodation.
- **Strengthen income and employment support for parents** by linking social assistance, training, employment mediation, childcare, and accessible services.
- **Introduce training for professionals** in the social, education, health, and justice systems to recognise and combat antigypsyism and anti-Roma attitudes.
- **Create sustainable mechanisms for the participation of Roma children and parents** in student councils, local consultative bodies, and the monitoring of policies that affect them.

CZECHIA

Housing

- **Ensure access to affordable social housing** for vulnerable families, providing children with a safe, stable and adequate home environment.
- Require municipalities to **maintain a minimum stock of social or low-cost housing.**
- **Reduce barriers to accessing housing**, including high deposits, advance rent requirements, previous rent or utility debts, and enforcement proceedings.
- **Encourage private landlords to rent to households in need** through state-backed guarantees.
- **Strengthen controls over excessive rents**, including in hostels, with rents based on local normative costs and the size of the dwelling rather than the number of occupants.
- **Strengthen inspections of private rental accommodation and hostels**, including compliance with housing standards and contractual arrangements.

Prevention of family separation

- **Strengthen the prevention of child removal** through timely field support and early intervention, backed by adequate and long-term funding and staffing of NGOs.
- **Develop long-term outreach work with families** in their own environment, with manageable caseloads allowing intensive and individualised support.
- **Strengthen multidisciplinary and interdepartmental cooperation.**
- **Intervene early and intensively when family difficulties emerge**, linking education, health and social services and working closely with the family.
- **Create multidisciplinary teams and counselling or educational-care centres** providing counselling, assessment and therapeutic support to children and young people.
- **Establish a central body responsible for the social and legal protection of children and families.**

Education

- **Ensure equal access to quality education** without discrimination or segregation for Roma children.
- **Implement educational desegregation** measures and support inclusive schools.
- **Strengthen inclusive education and the integration of socially disadvantaged children** into mainstream schools and kindergartens.
- **Strengthen teaching assistants** and other support professions in schools and kindergartens.
- **Increase Roma children's participation in preschool education.**
- **Ensure sufficient preschool availability and capacity** in socially excluded localities.
- **Strengthen cooperation** between schools, social services and families.
- **Train education staff on inclusion** and Roma-related issues.
- **Strengthen individualised support for socially disadvantaged pupils.**
- **Increase children's participation** in school and extracurricular activities.
- **Provide sustainable funding for free meals and drinks for children in poverty**, while simplifying administration for schools and providing dedicated coordination support.

- **Provide school-based tutoring and homework support**, including through after-school clubs.

Healthcare

- **Improve access to healthcare and preventive services** for disadvantaged families.
- **Establish permanent Roma health assistants/mediators**, including in hospitals, maternity wards and communities, with sustainable public funding; where NGOs provide the service, ensure multiannual funding.
- **Strengthen health education and prevention**, including healthy lifestyles, nutrition, sexual education and contraception, delivered directly in Roma families and schools in accessible language.
- **Improve access to psychological support**, including through greater reimbursement of private psychological care by health insurance.
- **Reintroduce school-supported preventive dental and paediatric check-ups**, including preventive vaccination activities.
- **Provide free dental treatment** for children under 15.

Equal treatment and participation

- **Strengthen measures to combat discrimination and prejudice**, particularly in education and wider society.
- **Establish Roma assistant positions** in Labour Office branches.
- **Establish social worker and Roma assistant** positions in schools**.**
- **Provide training and practical placements for Labour Office staff, civil servants and healthcare professionals** on Roma inclusion, communication and culturally appropriate service provision.
- **Include Roma culture in primary, secondary and tertiary education**, particularly in professional education for healthcare, nursing and social work.
- **Strengthen Roma children's and young people's participation** in school parliaments, community projects and decision-making processes.

Parents, poverty and access to rights

- **Develop financial-literacy and employment-support programmes** for parents.
- **Harmonise Labour Office methodologies across the country and make them transparent and publicly accessible**, enabling users to distinguish individual errors from systemic problems.
- **Strengthen the prevention of intergenerational poverty and social exclusion.**
- **Increase families' awareness** of available services and rights.

HUNGARY

- **Strengthen the legal enforcement and systematic monitoring of school admission practices** that contribute to the maintenance of segregation, including stricter oversight of catchment area arrangements and enrolment procedures.

- **Ensure the consistent and effective implementation of desegregation measures,** with clear responsibilities, timelines, and accountability mechanisms at national and local levels.

- **Increase the number of teachers and support professionals (school psychologists, developmental teachers, special education teachers, and social workers)** in schools located in disadvantaged and segregated areas, alongside targeted incentive schemes to address staff shortages.

- **Strengthen cooperation between schools, child protection services, and social welfare systems** to ensure integrated responses to the complex needs of disadvantaged children.

- **Expand early childhood development and family support services (e.g. Sure Start-type programmes) nationwide**, ensuring stable, long-term financing rather than project-based funding cycles.

- **Improve the targeting, transparency, and monitoring of additional per-student funding allocated to disadvantaged learners**, ensuring that resources effectively reach schools with the highest needs.

- **Investigate and sanction forms of "hidden" segregation, including the artificial inflation of special educational needs (SEN) classifications** that contribute to the indirect segregation of Roma children.

- **Combat the early school-leaving of Roma youth,** particularly at the secondary education level.

- **Strengthen the fight against antigypsyism and discrimination**, including by ensuring that independent Roma experts and representatives are meaningfully involved in decision-making, enabling Roma communities to formulate and represent their own interests.

ROMANIA

- **Strengthen and expand integrated, community-based, and culturally sensitive services in marginalised Roma communities**, including outreach, counselling, parenting support, mediation, and family assistance services.

- **Strengthen family separation prevention as a cross-cutting objective of social protection and child protection policies**, by developing early intervention mechanisms and ensuring that families at risk receive coordinated support before vulnerabilities escalate into crisis. Poverty should never be used, directly or indirectly, as a reason for family separation, and family preservation should be prioritised through adequate income and housing support, access to healthcare and education, parenting assistance, community-based services, and individualised case management. Family separation should remain a measure of last resort, based exclusively on the best interests of the child.

- **Increase investment in early childhood education and care, afterschool, school mediation,** and other inclusive educational support measures aimed at reducing educational inequalities and preventing school dropout.

- **Improve access to adequate housing, basic infrastructure, and essential public services** in segregated Roma settlements to address the structural determinants of child poverty and social exclusion.

- **Strengthen and ensure sustainable funding for the networks of Roma Health Mediators and School Mediators**, recognising their key role in facilitating access to services and building trust between communities and institutions.

- **Improve access to social protection measures and family benefits** by simplifying administrative procedures, strengthening institutional outreach, and ensuring that the most marginalised Roma families are effectively reached.

- **Enhance coordination and cooperation among education, health, social assistance, and child protection services** to provide integrated and holistic support to Roma children and their families.

- **Combat structural, systemic, and institutional antigypsyism across all policies and public services affecting Roma children's rights and wellbeing**, recognising it as a key driver that reinforces child poverty, unequal access to essential services, and the risk of unnecessary family separation. This should include stronger mechanisms to identify and monitor discriminatory practices, ensure institutional accountability, provide effective remedies, and systematically assess the impact of policies and services on Roma children and families.
- **Establish clear institutional responsibilities and measurable indicators for preventing unnecessary family separation**, including within the implementation and monitoring of the European Child Guarantee and the National Roma Strategic Framework.
- **Introduce mandatory and continuous training on antigypsyism, cultural competence, and Roma inclusion for professionals** working in education, healthcare, social assistance, and child protection systems, accompanied by clear institutional standards and accountability mechanisms to prevent discriminatory practices.
- **Strengthen data collection, monitoring, and research on Roma children** by systematically collecting disaggregated data and integrating both structural and cultural dimensions of vulnerability into policy analysis.
- **Ensure the meaningful participation of Roma communities and Roma civil society organisations** in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies concerning Roma children, while strengthening the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the European Child Guarantee through adequate funding and robust monitoring mechanisms.

SLOVAKIA

1. Strengthen efforts to reduce child poverty

- **Introduce targeted measures to reduce child poverty** in marginalised Roma communities.
- **Improve access to adequate income support**, employment opportunities for parents and affordable childcare.
- **Ensure that social benefits effectively protect children** from material deprivation and are not withdrawn in ways that may further harm vulnerable children.

2. Accelerate desegregation in education and housing

- **Implement stronger measures to eliminate school segregation** and promote inclusive education.
- **Prevent the creation of new segregated settlements** and support integrated housing solutions.
- **Ensure equal access to quality educational facilities**, public services and infrastructure.

3. Expand access to early childhood education and care

- **Remove financial, administrative and transport barriers** to participation.
- **Strengthen outreach programmes** supporting school readiness among disadvantaged children.

4. Improve healthcare access and health outcomes

- **Improve access to preventive healthcare**, vaccinations, maternal health services and mental health support.
- **Address environmental health risks** linked to poor housing and inadequate infrastructure.

5. Strengthen family support and prevent unnecessary family separation

- **Expand early intervention services**, field social work and family assistance programmes.
- **Increase support for kinship care** and family-based alternatives to institutional care.

6. Combat antigypsyism and discrimination

- **Introduce systematic measures to address discrimination** in education, healthcare, housing, employment and public services.
- **Strengthen anti-discrimination training for professionals** working with children.
- **Improve the representation of Roma history and the Roma Holocaust** in school curricula.

7. Improve access to participation and justice

- **Create more opportunities for Roma children to participate** in student councils, youth parliaments and local decision-making structures.
- **Strengthen legal literacy** and access to complaint mechanisms.
- **Support Roma youth-led initiatives** and leadership programmes.

8. Strengthen implementation and monitoring

- **Introduce measurable child-specific indicators** within the National Roma Strategic Framework and the Child Guarantee Action Plan.
- **Improve data collection on Roma child wellbeing** while respecting human rights standards.
- **Ensure sufficient and sustainable funding** for local implementation and community-based services.

9. Increase the participation of Roma children in policymaking

- **Involve Roma children and young people** in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies affecting them.
- **Support mechanisms that enable children to express their views** and influence decisions at local, regional and national levels.

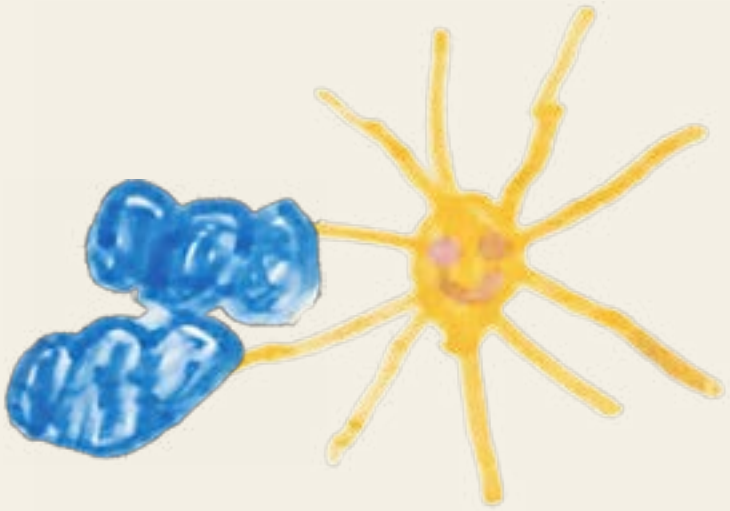
10. Invest in long-term, integrated solutions

- **Promote coordinated action** across education, housing, health, employment and social services.
- **Prioritise long-term interventions** that address the root causes of poverty and exclusion rather than short-term project-based solutions.
- **Ensure that all policies affecting Roma children are guided by the principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation** and the best interests of the child.

SPAIN

- **Make combating antigypsyism a cross-cutting requirement in all child-related and Roma-related policies**, with mandatory training, anti-bias safeguards, monitoring of discriminatory outcomes and effective remedies, recognising antigypsyism as a root cause of Roma child and family poverty and exclusion.
- **Establish Roma child poverty as a specific priority in Spain and Catalonia**, with measurable targets, budget and annual monitoring.
- **Improve data collection without creating ethnic registers**, using voluntary, rights-based, anonymised and community-trusted mechanisms.
- **Guarantee access to adequate housing for Roma families with childre**n, including anti-discrimination enforcement in rental markets, emergency housing alternatives and measures against overcrowding.
- **Family separation:** Reinforce that poverty and inadequate housing should never be treated as parental neglect in child protection assessments, and that preventive family support must always be prioritised.
- **Introduce Roma mediators and culturally competent protocols** in social services, child protection, schools and healthcare.
- **Strengthen access to early childhood education for Roma children**, especially from 0 to 3 years old, with free places, outreach and family support.
- **Adopt strong anti-segregation measures in education**, including monitoring of school concentration, inclusive admissions policies and support for schools with high vulnerability.
- **Provide free school meals, transport, after-school support, digital tools and educational materials** for Roma children in poverty.
- **Include Roma history, culture and antigypsyism in school curricula** and teacher training.
- **Expand mental health, oral health, nutrition and preventive healthcare** programmes for Roma children and adolescents.
- **Improve access to the Ingreso Mínimo Vital, Renda Garantida de Ciutadania and other benefits** through proactive support, simplified procedures and community-based accompaniment.

- **Support Roma parents** through employment pathways, childcare, training, recognition of traditional economic activities and measures against labour market discrimination.
- **Institutional accountability:** Place stronger emphasis on the gap between political commitments and actual implementation. Spain has strategies and legal frameworks in place, but their effectiveness is often limited by insufficient funding, weak monitoring and a lack of institutional responsibility. Clear accountability mechanisms and concrete, measurable actions are essential.
- **Extended families:** Recognise their important role in supporting and protecting Roma children, including family-based alternatives to institutional care.
- **Create safe participation spaces for Roma children and youth** in schools, municipalities and policy-making structures.
- **Ensure access to justice for Roma children and families** affected by discrimination, with child-friendly complaint mechanisms and legal support.
- **Involve Roma organisations, including FAGiC**, in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies affecting Roma children.



ERGO
NETWORK

European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network

www.ERGOnetwork.org