# Roma children in Europe
# Child poverty and prevention of family separation in Spain

**Introduction**

This case study has been prepared by Bianca Elena Galusca (b.galusca@fagic.org), Head of the European and International Area and of the Participation and Youth Area at the Federation of Roma Associations of Catalonia (FAGiC).

FAGiC is an umbrella organisation created in 1991 that brings together 96 Roma associations across Catalonia. As the most representative Roma organisation in the region, FAGiC works to defend and promote the rights of Roma people, fight antigypsyism and racism, and advocate for equality in areas such as employment, housing, education, youth participation and access to rights. FAGiC also channels the voice of Roma communities and promotes meaningful dialogue between Roma people, public institutions and wider society, at local, national and international levels.

The methodology used for this case study combines desk research with field-based qualitative input. It draws on national and European studies, policy documents and institutional sources, including the Spanish Ministry of Social Rights, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Council of Europe and relevant Roma inclusion frameworks. The analysis also takes into account available data on poverty, education, housing, discrimination and access to services affecting Roma children and families in Spain. This evidence is complemented by FAGiC's grassroots knowledge and direct insights gathered through its work with Roma families, educators, local professionals, young people and community actors in Catalonia. The geographical scope is Spain, with a specific focus on Catalonia, where FAGiC's direct community work allows the identification of concrete barriers, needs and good practices affecting Roma children and their families.

Roma communities in Spain continue to face widespread exclusion and deep structural inequalities, especially in access to education, employment, adequate housing, health and social protection. More than 80% of Roma people live at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and the impact is particularly severe for children and young people. Education remains one of the strongest drivers of inequality: only a small proportion of Roma people over the age of 16 have completed compulsory or higher education, while early school leaving among Roma youth remains dramatically higher than among the general population.

These inequalities are not experienced equally within the Roma community. Roma women face intersecting forms of discrimination that limit their access to education, employment, participation and services. Roma children living in poverty, overcrowded housing or unstable family income situations are exposed to higher risks of school exclusion, poor health outcomes and institutional mistrust. Migrant Roma families from Eastern Europe often face additional legal, linguistic and administrative barriers, which further intensify their socio-economic marginalisation.

Investing in the wellbeing and social inclusion of Roma children is essential because child poverty is not only a present hardship; it reproduces inequality across generations. Roma children need stable housing, inclusive education, access to healthcare, adequate nutrition, safe participation spaces and protection from discrimination. Public policies must support Roma families before poverty becomes school failure, housing exclusion, poor health or child protection intervention. For FAGiC, investing in Roma children means defending their rights, strengthening families and ensuring that Roma inclusion policies produce real change in the lives of the next generation.

# *Roma children in Europe – child poverty and family separation in Spain*

## Demographic considerations

There is no official figure for the number of Roma children in Spain, because Spanish population statistics do not systematically collect ethnic data. Available estimates place the total Roma population in Spain at around 725,000–750,000 people. Based on the known age structure of the Roma population, Roma children represent a significant share of the community, but a precise number of Roma children cannot be stated responsibly. In territorial terms, Roma children live predominantly in urban environments. The 2015 national housing study found that 92.88% of the Roma population lived within the urban fabric, while fewer than 3% lived in settlements segregated from urban centres. This does not mean that rural Roma families are absent, but the main concentration of Roma children and the services affecting them is urban and metropolitan (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Study-Map on Housing and the Roma Population, 2015).

The Roma population in Spain is predominantly young. Fundación Secretariado Gitano has reported that **66% of Roma people in Spain are under 30 years old**, which contrasts with the ageing trend of the general Spanish population. Roma children are not a homogeneous group. In Catalonia, FAGiC works with long-established Catalan Roma families as well as Roma families with migration backgrounds, including families from Eastern Europe. Their situations vary greatly, but the children most exposed to risk are usually those living in families affected by unstable housing, informal or precarious employment, administrative difficulties, school segregation, discrimination and limited access to social protection.

Roma children's characteristics must therefore be understood through an intersectional lens. Some children grow up in stable family and community networks but face external barriers in school, housing or public services. Others experience accumulated vulnerability: overcrowded housing, evictions, irregular income, digital exclusion, difficulty accessing benefits, and institutional mistrust. For FAGiC, this means that demographic data alone are not enough; the daily conditions in which children grow up must also be considered.

## Roma child poverty

Roma child poverty in Spain is extremely high. Roma-specific sources estimate child poverty at between 86.8% and 89%, depending on the indicator and methodology used. The State Roma Operational Plan 2023–2026 cites an estimated Roma child poverty rate of 89% and severe child poverty of 70.2%. These figures confirm that poverty among Roma children is not marginal or occasional; it is structural and frequently severe.

For comparison, the general child poverty and exclusion figures are also high but significantly lower. In 2025, 33.8% of children under 18 in Spain were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Catalonia, the figure was even higher: 36.5% of children under 18, equivalent to around 490,900 children, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Roma children are therefore affected by the general child poverty crisis, but with a much sharper intensity due to the specific impact of antigypsyism, school exclusion, labour market barriers and housing discrimination.

Roma child poverty is visible in daily life: overcrowded housing, difficulty paying rent and utilities, lack of adequate study space, limited access to digital tools, food insecurity, delays in accessing social benefits, school absenteeism linked to family instability, and stress inside the household. It also appears in less visible ways, such as children internalising low expectations, families avoiding institutions because of previous discrimination, or schools interpreting Roma poverty through stereotypes rather than through support needs.

The causes are structural. Many Roma families face barriers to stable employment, discrimination in access to housing, lower educational attainment caused by school segregation and early school leaving, limited access to quality early childhood education, administrative complexity in accessing benefits, and persistent antigypsyism. Poverty is often transmitted across generations because the same barriers affect parents and children: parents with precarious employment and low income struggle to secure stable housing and educational support, while children growing up in poverty face higher risks of school failure, poor health, social exclusion and later labour market insecurity.

The lifetime effects are severe. Poverty in childhood reduces educational opportunities, damages mental and physical health, limits social participation and increases the risk of future unemployment or precarious work. In child protection contexts, poverty can also increase the risk of family separation when institutions do not provide enough preventive support. From FAGiC's perspective, the main problem is not Roma families' lack of care, but the lack of adequate, timely and culturally competent public support for families under pressure.

In FAGiC's experience, Roma child poverty often appears as a chain of problems rather than a single event. A family may lose informal income, fall into rent arrears, face overcrowding with relatives, struggle to provide school materials, and then be assessed by services as "non-compliant" because appointments, documents or school routines become harder to maintain. In such cases, mediation can make a decisive difference: it helps the family understand the administrative process, helps services understand the family context, and focuses intervention on support rather than blame.

A composite example from FAGiC's practice is that of a Roma mother caring for several children while facing housing instability and irregular income. The children are cared for and emotionally attached to their family, but the material conditions create concern among services. Without mediation, the case can quickly escalate towards child protection measures. With mediation, the priority becomes stabilising income, school attendance, access to benefits and housing alternatives. This kind of preventive work is essential to avoid confusing poverty with neglect.

**Roma children and housing**

The housing situation of Roma children and their families in Spain remains one of the main drivers of poverty and social exclusion. Although many Roma families live in standard housing, the most vulnerable Roma children are still affected by overcrowding, poor housing conditions, housing insecurity, forced evictions, informal settlements, lack of access to social housing, and discrimination in the private rental market.

In Spain, access to adequate housing is strongly connected with income, employment stability and discrimination. Many Roma families face barriers when trying to rent a home, especially when landlords identify them as Roma or when they cannot provide regular employment contracts, payslips or financial guarantees. As a result, some families are forced to live in overcrowded homes with relatives, insecure rooms, occupied dwellings, degraded housing or temporary accommodation.

In Catalonia, FAGiC observes similar patterns, especially in the Barcelona metropolitan area and in municipalities with high housing pressure. The broader housing crisis affects many families, but Roma families face an additional barrier: antigypsyism in access to rental housing. For Roma children, this means lack of privacy, lack of study space, emotional stress, school instability and a greater risk of being seen by institutions through a "risk" perspective.

Poor housing conditions can also affect children's health, education and wellbeing. Overcrowding and housing instability make it more difficult to maintain school routines, attend medical appointments, complete administrative procedures or access digital learning. In child protection contexts, there is also a serious risk that poverty-related housing problems are interpreted as parental neglect instead of as a consequence of structural poverty and housing exclusion. Forced evictions and threatened evictions can intensify this risk by abruptly disrupting schooling, healthcare and family support networks. A concrete example documented by Fundación Secretariado Gitano concerns 26 predominantly Roma families in La Pomecia (Teruel): an eviction/removal procedure could have left 96 people homeless, including 31 children. The litigation highlighted the need for proportionality assessments and alternative housing before displacement. For families with children, eviction without a stable rehousing solution can also bring them into closer contact with child-protection systems, making preventive housing support directly relevant to preventing unnecessary family separation.

A recurring situation observed by FAGiC involves Roma families with children living in overcrowded or unstable housing after losing income or being unable to access regular rental contracts. In some cases, the family maintains strong care bonds, school attendance and community support, but the housing situation triggers institutional concern. Without proper mediation, public services may interpret the situation only through a risk lens, while the family experiences the intervention as threatening. FAGiC's mediation role is often to clarify the family context, support access to benefits and housing resources, and help institutions distinguish between poverty-related hardship and actual neglect.

**Roma children and healthcare**

Roma children in Spain have access to the public health system, but equal legal access does not always mean equal health outcomes. Roma children's health is strongly affected by social determinants such as poverty, housing conditions, food insecurity, school exclusion, discrimination, digital barriers and family stress.

In general, Roma families use primary healthcare services, paediatric care and vaccination services, but they may face barriers in preventive care, specialised care, mental health, oral health, nutrition, disability assessment and neurodevelopmental support. Spain's national Roma health surveys show persistent inequalities in health and in the use of preventive services, even where universal healthcare formally exists. Antenatal care is therefore important not only as a medical service but also as an early point for building trust with mothers and connecting families to social support. Childhood vaccination is available through the public system, yet continuity can be harder for families facing unstable housing, mobility, administrative barriers or mistrust. For Roma adolescents, sexual and reproductive health information and services need to be accessible, confidential, non-stigmatising and culturally competent, with particular attention to Roma girls and young women. Poverty affects children's nutrition, access to sport and leisure, sleep conditions, emotional wellbeing and continuity of care.

Mental health is an increasingly important concern. Roma children and adolescents exposed to poverty, discrimination, housing insecurity or school exclusion may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional distress and lack of trust in institutions. However, mental health services are often difficult to access due to waiting lists, stigma, lack of culturally competent professionals and administrative barriers.

In Catalonia, FAGiC observes that Roma families may need support to navigate the health system, especially when dealing with digital appointments, referrals, mental health services, disability recognition or services for neurodiverse children. Migrant Roma families may also face language barriers, administrative uncertainty and mistrust due to previous experiences of discrimination. Health and social professionals can also play a preventive role in family separation by referring families early to income, housing and community support when a child's health problem is linked to material deprivation, rather than treating poverty itself as evidence of inadequate parenting.

**Roma children and education**

Education remains one of the areas where Roma children in Spain face the strongest inequalities. Although Roma children have formal access to compulsory education, equal access does not translate into equal outcomes. Roma pupils are still affected by school segregation, low expectations, absenteeism linked to poverty and housing instability, lack of access to early childhood education, digital exclusion and weak continuity into post-compulsory education. Inequality begins before compulsory schooling: Fundación Secretariado Gitano has called for free incorporation of Roma children into early childhood education, precisely because unequal access at the earliest ages contributes to later educational gaps. The 2023 FSG education study also shows how sharply trajectories deteriorate in adolescence: 40% of Roma students leave education when they turn 16, and the school-failure rate among Roma youth aged 16–24 is 62.8%, compared with 4% in the general population. More recent FSG reporting describes early school leaving at around 86%, illustrating the very high risk that Roma adolescents end up outside education and training. These patterns make early childhood education, transition support and sustained guidance through secondary education central prevention measures.

In Catalonia, FAGiC observes that many Roma families value education but face barriers that schools do not always understand properly: unstable housing, lack of study space, difficulty paying for materials or activities, discrimination and mistrust created by previous negative experiences with institutions. In some cases, schools interpret Roma children's difficulties as lack of family interest, when the real issue is poverty, exclusion and insufficient support.

What is needed is a comprehensive approach: free and accessible early childhood education, anti-segregation measures, Roma mediators, family-school accompaniment, tutoring, school meals, transport support, digital access, teacher training on antigypsyism, and inclusion of Roma history and culture in the curriculum. Keeping children successfully connected to education is also a family-preservation measure: when schools respond to hardship with support and mediation rather than punitive escalation, absenteeism linked to poverty or housing instability is less likely to become a trigger for unnecessary child-protection intervention.

**Roma children and other services**

Beyond health and education, Roma children's effective access to services depends heavily on household income, place of residence and the ability of families to navigate fragmented administrative systems. School meals, transport, after-school activities, counselling, leisure and sports, digital connectivity and educational materials can be decisive for children in poverty. The European Child Guarantee establishes free and effective access for children in need to education and school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day, but Roma children may still miss out where information is not accessible, applications are digital or documentation is difficult to provide.

In practice, transport costs can become a barrier when children attend schools or services outside their neighbourhood, while fees for extracurricular activities can exclude children even when compulsory schooling itself is free. Free or subsidised school meals are particularly important for households facing food insecurity, and after-school support can compensate for overcrowded housing, lack of study space and the digital divide. Counselling and psychosocial support are also relevant for children affected by discrimination, eviction, family stress or school exclusion.

A useful concrete example is the Kumpania programme in the Valencian Community, a specialised socio-educational service for Roma children, adolescents and young people and their families. It combines individualised educational guidance, academic reinforcement, psychological and social support, work with families and coordination with schools. Its Impulsa Kumpania strand also works with families of children of early-childhood-education age to encourage early schooling.

The programme shows why services are more effective when they accompany the child and family together rather than expecting families to navigate separate systems alone.

From FAGiC's grassroots perspective, the most effective model is one-stop or coordinated accompaniment: a mediator can help a family apply for school meals, understand transport support, obtain digital access and connect a child to tutoring or counselling. This kind of practical support also has a family-preservation dimension. When basic services stabilise a child's daily life, they reduce the accumulation of problems that can otherwise be interpreted by institutions as parental failure and can escalate unnecessarily towards child-protection intervention.

***Support for Roma parents***

Roma parents face a labour-market situation marked by high unemployment, precarious work and weak social protection. The FSG comparative employment and poverty study found a Roma unemployment rate of 52% in 2018, more than three times the general rate at the time, while Roma women faced an unemployment rate of 60% and an employment rate of only around 16–17%. Roma workers are also more likely to depend on self-employment, temporary work and activities such as street vending, which can make income unstable and complicate access to contributory protections and work-life balance measures. Income-support schemes such as the Ingreso Mínimo Vital (IMV), regional minimum-income schemes and family-related benefits are therefore especially important. The 2024 FSG–ISEAK study on the IMV specifically examined its coverage and impact on Roma households and confirms the relevance of minimum-income protection for reducing both general and child poverty. However, formal eligibility does not guarantee effective access: digital applications, documentation, changes in household composition, administrative delays and limited knowledge of entitlements can exclude precisely the families with the greatest need.

Work-life balance policies, childcare and early childhood education can support Roma parents to enter training or employment, but access must be affordable and compatible with precarious or non-standard working hours. Roma women can face a particularly heavy combination of care responsibilities, labour-market discrimination and low-quality employment opportunities. Support should therefore combine childcare, employment pathways, skills development, anti-discrimination enforcement and personalised benefit advice rather than treating employment and family support as separate issues.

A recurring FAGiC-type case is a parent moving between irregular work, benefit applications and care responsibilities while trying to maintain school routines for several children. Missing an appointment or failing to submit a digital document can interrupt income and quickly create rent or utility arrears. Early community-based accompaniment can prevent this administrative problem from becoming a housing crisis and, in turn, reduce the risk that material hardship is misread as neglect. Supporting parents' income and care capacity is therefore also a concrete strategy for preventing avoidable family separation.

***Roma children and antigypsyism***

Antigypsyism cuts across virtually every area described in this case study. Roma children can experience it directly through insults, bullying and hate speech, and indirectly when stereotypes shape decisions by schools, landlords, employers, healthcare providers, police or social services. In 2024, Fundación Secretariado Gitano documented 399 discrimination cases involving Roma people, including 25 in education, 45 in housing, 15 in health services, 35 in employment and 82 in access to goods and services. These figures represent reported and assisted cases rather than the full scale of discrimination, which is likely to be underreported.

In education, antigypsyism can appear through low expectations, school segregation, stereotyping of families or failure to respond adequately to racist bullying. In housing, it can mean a landlord or estate agent refusing a family once Roma identity is perceived. In services, it can appear as suspicion, disrespect or assumptions about parenting and family organisation. For children, repeated exposure can damage trust, self-esteem and willingness to participate in school or public institutions.

The consequences are cumulative. A child whose family is rejected in the rental market may experience overcrowding or repeated moves; this can disrupt school attendance and healthcare, which can then trigger additional scrutiny from institutions. If antigypsyist assumptions influence the interpretation of these difficulties, structural exclusion can be transformed into an assessment of parental deficiency. This is why combating antigypsyism is directly connected to preventing unnecessary family separation: child-protection decisions must distinguish material deprivation caused by discrimination from actual abuse or neglect.

Access to remedies remains a challenge. FSG's discrimination reports show the value of specialised victim support and strategic litigation, but many Roma people do not report discrimination because of mistrust, fear of retaliation or the expectation that nothing will change. Children and families need accessible complaint channels, Roma mediators, independent legal support and professionals trained to recognise antigypsyism, including its institutional and structural forms.

**Prevention of Roma family separation**

Roma children can be at risk of being separated from their families when poverty, housing instability, overcrowding or administrative difficulties are interpreted as parental neglect. In Spain and Catalonia, there is no public ethnic-disaggregated data that allows a precise assessment of how many Roma children are removed from their families. This lack of data is itself a serious problem, because it makes it difficult to identify possible disproportionality, institutional bias or discriminatory practices affecting Roma families.

From FAGiC's grassroots experience, the main concern is not that Roma families lack care for their children, but that public systems sometimes assess Roma families mainly through a risk lens. Families living in poverty may be under greater institutional surveillance, especially when they face unstable housing, irregular income, school absenteeism linked to hardship, or difficulties complying with administrative requirements. In these situations, antigypsyism can influence how professionals interpret family life, parenting practices and material deprivation.

There are attempts to keep families together, particularly through social services, family support programmes, school mediation, housing support and community-based intervention. However, these measures are often insufficient, fragmented or activated too late. Preventive support should arrive before a situation escalates into child protection intervention. Roma mediators and Roma organisations should be involved at an early stage, especially when the main issues are poverty, housing exclusion, access to benefits, school attendance or mistrust between families and institutions.

Similar tendencies can also affect other racialised and migrant families, especially when poverty, language barriers, insecure housing or administrative status are confused with lack of parental care. However, Roma families face a specific form of discrimination: antigypsyism. This means that their poverty is too often read through stereotypes about Roma parenting, education, hygiene, housing or family organisation, instead of being understood as the result of structural exclusion.

Family separation must never be used as a response to poverty. When parents provide care, affection and protection but lack adequate income, housing or administrative support, the correct public response is family support, not removal.

Preventing Roma family separation requires clear protocols to distinguish poverty from neglect, culturally competent child protection assessments, Roma mediators, emergency housing alternatives, income support, parenting support and stronger cooperation between social services, schools, health services and Roma organisations.

**Participation and justice for Roma children**

Roma children and adolescents are still underrepresented in many of the formal spaces where decisions about school, neighbourhood life and public policy are made. Student councils, municipal children's councils, youth organisations and consultation processes are formally open to them, but participation can be limited by school segregation, early school leaving, poverty, lack of information, low institutional trust and the absence of Roma role models. Participation should not depend on children already being well connected to institutions.

Roma organisations can help create safer routes into civic participation. FAGiC's work with young people and community actors shows the importance of spaces where Roma children and youth can discuss discrimination, education, culture and public policy in their own voice and then connect those views to schools and public administrations. Other initiatives, such as FSG's national meetings of Roma students and socio-educational programmes, similarly demonstrate that Roma young people participate when institutions actively create inclusive opportunities and recognise their leadership.

Access to justice is equally important. Roma children may need remedies for discriminatory treatment in education, housing, policing or access to services, yet ordinary complaint systems can be difficult for children to understand and families may mistrust institutions. Child-friendly information, free or affordable legal assistance, specialised equality bodies, Roma mediators and the possibility for Roma organisations to accompany cases are essential. FSG's annual discrimination work, including strategic litigation, provides a concrete example of how victims can be supported beyond simply recording an incident.

Participation also matters in child-protection proceedings. When a decision may affect where a child lives or whether they remain with their family, the child's views must be heard in an age-appropriate and safe way, and families must understand the procedure and have access to representation. For Roma children, this requires safeguards against antigypsyist bias and meaningful involvement of trusted mediators or community organisations where appropriate. Justice should not only be available after harm occurs; accessible participation and complaint mechanisms can identify problems early and help prevent escalation, including unnecessary family separation.

***Roma children in the National Roma Strategic Framework***

Spain's National Roma Strategic Framework 2021–2030 includes Roma children as a priority group and addresses areas that directly affect them, such as education, employment, housing, health, poverty, digital inclusion, antigypsyism, gender equality, culture and participation.

The framework is aligned with the EU Roma Strategic Framework and includes objectives related to reducing poverty and improving education. It also recognises the need to reduce the gap between Roma children and the general child population. The First Operational Plan 2023–2026 contains child-relevant measures more broadly across education, poverty and social inclusion: these include early childhood education and care, school segregation and educational success, links with the European Child Guarantee, digital inclusion, access to social protection and participation. The relevance therefore goes beyond early childhood education and poverty alone, although these are two particularly important areas for preventing the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

However, the measures are not sufficient. The main weakness is implementation. The framework includes the right priorities, but it needs stronger funding, clearer territorial coordination, measurable targets, Roma-specific child indicators and stronger monitoring. Housing exclusion, family poverty and prevention of family separation are not developed with enough depth. Antigypsyism is recognised as a core equality challenge in the national and EU frameworks, but it must be mainstreamed more consistently across every child-related measure: education, housing, healthcare, social services and child protection. Without this, policies may address the symptoms of exclusion while leaving a root cause untouched.

In Catalonia, the National Roma Framework should be better connected with the Pla Integral del Poble Gitano and with municipal services. FAGiC's perspective is that Roma organisations must be involved not only in consultation, but also in implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

What is missing is a stronger child-centred approach: specific targets on Roma child poverty, early childhood education, school segregation, housing instability, access to services, health inequalities, participation and prevention of family separation.

***Roma children in the Child Guarantee – National Action Plan***

Roma children are explicitly recognised in Spain's National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee, but the priority is still too weak in practice. The 2024 assessment of Spain's implementation notes that Roma children are included as a target group and that some measures are specifically aimed at them, alongside broader measures for children in need. These include socio-educational support such as the Kumpania programme, school attendance measures, free or subsidised school meals, housing support, health-promotion actions and parenting support for vulnerable families. However, the same assessment identifies a serious weakness: Spain does not yet include specific Roma-child indicators, only a general mention of Roma children as a target group. That is not enough for proper monitoring or accountability.

GOOD PRACTICE – KUMPANIA (Valencian Community). Kumpania can be considered a promising practice because it provides tailored, sustained socio-educational support to Roma children and young people while working simultaneously with their families and schools. Created as a specialised service, it aims to increase school enrolment and continuity, support completion of compulsory secondary education and encourage progression to post-compulsory studies. The model includes academic reinforcement, individual guidance, psychological/social support and family intervention; Impulsa Kumpania also promotes early schooling. The European Commission's 2024 implementation report on national Roma strategic frameworks highlighted Kumpania as a promising development supported by ESF+. More information: https://www.gitanos.org/que_hacemos/educacion/programa_kumpania/index.html.es

The need for stronger measures is clear. In Spain, the Roma child poverty rate was estimated at 89%, and severe child poverty at 70.2%, according to the State Roma Operational Plan 2023–2026. The same plan explicitly calls for the European Child Guarantee to address Roma children's needs, especially those in severe vulnerability. Educational exclusion is also severe: Fundación Secretariado Gitano's 2023 study found Roma school failure at 62.8%, compared with 4% among the general student population, and only 41.4% of Roma students graduate, compared with 84% overall.

In Catalonia, this gap is also visible. Idescat reports that 36.5% of children under 18 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, above Spain's 33.8% and the EU's 24.3%. In addition, Catalonia's new Roma Strategy 2026–2036 starts from a harsh reality: 60% of Roma households face material deprivation and school dropout reaches around 65%.

Therefore, the measures are relevant but insufficient. Spain and Catalonia need binding Roma-specific indicators, stable funding, anti-segregation plans, free access to early childhood education, Roma mediators, family support, and real participation of Roma organisations in design, delivery and evaluation.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Roma child poverty in Spain and Catalonia is structural, multidimensional and strongly linked to antigypsyism. It is not only a problem of low income. Roma children experience poverty through housing instability, school segregation, health inequalities, lack of access to services, digital exclusion, discrimination and weak participation.

The available evidence shows that Roma children are among the most vulnerable children in Spain. In Catalonia, the absence of official ethnic-disaggregated data makes the situation less visible, but FAGiC's grassroots work confirms the same pattern: many Roma families have strong care networks but are trapped by poverty, housing exclusion, unstable income, discrimination and bureaucratic barriers.

The main institutional risk is confusing poverty with neglect. Public systems must stop treating Roma families mainly as a risk and start treating them as rights-holders who need timely, culturally competent and preventive support. Family separation should never be a response to poverty.

The priority must be prevention: preventing poverty from becoming school failure, preventing housing exclusion from becoming child protection intervention, preventing discrimination from becoming institutional exclusion, and preventing Roma children from growing up without voice in the policies that affect them.

Recommendations:

- 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 children, including anti-discrimination enforcement in rental markets, emergency housing alternatives and measures against overcrowding.
- 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.

- 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.
- Recognise the important role of extended families 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.
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