



Baden-Württemberg  
STAATSMINISTERIUM



# WITH AND FOR ROMA IN THE DANUBE REGION

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## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR?

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2020, 4 countries of the Danube region prepared and implemented the project called “With and for Roma in the Danube region”. Partner organizations from Germany, Serbia, Romania and Slovakia joined the efforts, capacities and good will and organized workshops, seminars, conferences, study visits etc., to strengthen networks and develop capacities in order to make the lives of Roma and other disadvantaged groups better.

The project was financed by the Ministry of state, Baden-Württemberg, through the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Prosperity through Diversity).

Until June 2022, when the project ended, partner organizations succeeded to address, discuss, define actions and implement activities regarded:

- exchanging best practices with vulnerable groups in the Danube region, tackling issues like: importance and access to education; prevention of domestic violence and gender based violence; prevention of youth marriages; empowerment of families; poverty; youth employment; legal migrations, etc.
- strengthening capacities of the partners organizations
- new methodologies in working with Roma and other vulnerable groups
- networking and cooperation between partners within Danube region countries





# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project “With and for Roma in the Danube region” was implemented in four countries that belong to the Danube region: Serbia, Germany, Slovakia and Romania. It started in december 2020 with a kick off meeting in Stuttgart and ended with an evaluation meeting in Romania, in March 2022.

## THE MAIN GOAL

The main goal of the project was to strengthen the network and develop capacities for working with Roma and other socially disadvantaged groups in the Danube region.

## THE PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

The project was financed by the Ministry of state, Baden-Württemberg, through the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Prosperity through Diversity).

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011<sup>1</sup>. It aims to strengthen cooperation between countries of the Danube region and includes nine EU member states: Bulgaria, Germany, Croatia, Romania, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Out of the EU, there are five more member states: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Strategy was jointly developed by the Commission, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges together<sup>2</sup>. The Strategy itself is not about funding, it is about helping establish closer cooperation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/about/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid





The project was realized by Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization from Novi Sad, Serbia in cooperation with Diakonie Württemberg from Germany and partners from Evangelical Academia from Sibiu, Romania and Evangelical Diakonie from Slovakia.

## THE ROAD MAP OF THE PROJECT

The project was planned to be implemented in several phases, through next steps:

- ✓ identification of problems and challenges in working with the target group
- ✓ defining the project objectives and small projects activities
- ✓ implementation of the local projects in partner countries
- ✓ monitoring and online joint partner meetings
- ✓ evaluation and documentation of the project; identification of learning points; lessons learnt; recommendations for future actions; publishing material, etc.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project started in December 2020, with the **kick off meeting in Stuttgart**. There, the representatives of partner organizations discussed the postponed start of the project, caused by the Covid19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the discussion was deepened with the exploration of the project target group, and they were several important questions raised:

- ✓ Where do Roma come from?
- ✓ Why are they here?
- ✓ What do they need?

These questions helped project partners to make a focus of the project clear and to define **further steps**, which were:

- ✓ Starting the local projects in Serbia and Romania
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- ✓ Starting the local projects in Germany and Serbia
- ✓ Mid-term evaluation in Stuttgart, Ger-

many

- ✓ Study visit - Partner organization from Serbia visited Slovakia and Romania in order to transfer the knowledge and share good practice
- ✓ Dissemination of project results and best practices
- ✓ Evaluation meeting in Sibiu, Romania
- ✓ Reporting, documenting, publishing material

When partner organizations identified their problems and key issues, they agreed upon the fact that they are all having similar topics to tackle. That is why they came out with the joint approach and synchronized activities that they were implementing together: Serbia and Romania, Serbia and Slovakia and Serbia and Germany.



# GERMANY

## THE GENERAL SITUATION

Since 1977 the Social Services of the Protestant Churches in Württemberg Diakonie in Württemberg has worked on different projects concerning Sinti and Roma. The projects have been named „Roma-projects“, but in many cases the projects aimed to help all people in need. It turned out that many of them were Roma. For instance, from 2008 to 2013, Hoffnung für Osteuropa and Brot für die Welt funded EHO's project in Serbia called „support for expelled Roma“.

Reflecting on Diakonie Württemberg's social Work for Roma, the year 2014 can be seen as a turning point, having Serbia to be declared as a „safe country of origin“. In the same year the protestant Church in Württemberg has nominated a pastor to be responsible for the work of the church for and with Sinti and Roma, for the first time. The decision of the Synod in Württemberg 2015 to increase its support to the work of EHO for returnees from Germany also helped the Diakonie Württemberg to focus more on social Work for Roma. It is important to remember that 2015 was the year in which Germany opened its doors for refugees in a bigger frame than before or after, declaring at the same time that refugees from Serbia and other „safe countries of origin“ would have special treatment, helping them to return.

A further eye-opener was a study visit in 2016 to Serbia, organized by several stakeholders from Baden-Württemberg. The study visit was named: „Serbia: A Safe country of origin? An asylum policy

study tour - on the trail of the realities of Roma life“. For Diakonie Württemberg it became more and more clear that a manifold approach is needed, with other stakeholders within:

- 1) the Danube Region (respectively in the EU, within the Council of Europe),
- 2) the Church, society and the social services in Baden-Württemberg and
- 3) within its own organization.

One of the decisions that resulted out of this process was to ask EHO to take the lead in a multinational project, focusing on social work for and with Roma.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATION

The partner organization from Germany was Diakonie Württemberg, from Württemberg. Diakonie is the non-profit social welfare organization of Germany's Protestant churches. It's mission is to practice charity in the model of Jesus Christ. The Diakonie operates independently, across political parties, respecting the dignity and uniqueness of every human being, promoting individual's right to independence and self-determination.

Diakonie provides aid to people in need, to people with disabilities or illness, to children and families, to immigrants and their families, to those struggling with addiction, and to other disadvantaged groups. In addition, Diakonie advocates on behalf of the underprivileged in politics



and society, leading discussions on the causes of poverty and social injustice. As the social welfare organization of Germany's Protestant churches, Diakonie is the place where its employees and volunteers stand up for those in need.

Diakonie's members include the charities of 21 churches (including Württemberg) that belong to the Protestant church in Germany, the charities of nine other independent churches integrated into the Diakonie working group and 70 agencies operating in various fields of social work, public health and child welfare. As a charity organization, Diakonie Deutschland represents the interests of those it serves at the government level. It also advocates on behalf of various national and international organizations, as well as in the European Union.

The Greek word *diakonia* means service. Based on the Christian view of humanity, diakonia helps all people who are in need and seek support. Being a regional umbrella organization, Diakonie Württemberg plays a role as a regional office, supporting its members in their work by providing legal advice, training and other assistance. This service promotes and secures the professionalism of the diaconal work as well as the financial framework. A comprehensive and rapid transfer of information guarantees that all members can contribute and participate in the association's activities. In addition, members can take advantage of individual consulting services from qualified specialists:

- ✓ who are thoroughly familiar with the specific framework conditions of diaconal organizations,
- ✓ who incorporate the entire networking knowledge of the association in the respective area of assistance,
- ✓ who work in an interdisciplinary manner (oriented to the respective specialist area, supplemented by knowledge of law, business administration, public relations, etc.) and contribute project management experience.

Further on, Diakonie Württemberg is responsible for carrying out different tasks and projects that are delegated from the church to its Diakonia, such as:

- ✓ Partnerships with the Protestant Churches in Slovakia and Romania

- ✓ Help for refugees
- ✓ Intercultural work
- ✓ Ecumenical scholarships
- ✓ Carrying out collections for Diakonie and Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World)
- ✓ Placement and supervision of federal volunteers
- ✓ Social service and pastoral care for the deaf
- ✓ Theological-ethical statements

Diakonie Württemberg has also a coordination and representation function, by covering many activities:

- ✓ Coordination of the various areas of work of the Diakonie at the state level
- ✓ Representation of the rights and interests of members in state and church bodies
- ✓ Advocacy of those in need of help in the committees and in public
- ✓ External representation of the Württemberg Diakonie through press and public relations work
- ✓ Negotiation of finances for local activism

# Diakonie

## Württemberg

### WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

In combination with other local projects of the Diakonie Württemberg and its member organizations, as well as through the cooperation with EHO, it has become clear that there is still a lot of work to do. The main issue were identified:

- ✓ Lack of concepts for social work in Württemberg for Roma and public awareness about their need,
- ✓ Lack of awareness that Roma background is not homogeneous.

- ✓ Absence of evidence based on scholar debate for social work with and for Roma.

- ✓ Missing clear statements from politics and civil society about separate statistics and evidence based research on social work for Roma (due to law and history).

- ✓ Limping reality reference, facing the complicated situation of German Sinti and Roma, as recognized, partly integrated citizens in Germany and other groups of Sinti and Roma, such as refugees and EU migrants.

- ✓ Limited resources when it comes to the idea "with Roma ". There is a question about how to raise scholarships (for Roma from Germany and from abroad to study social work in Germany).

- ✓ A need to keep on doing awareness training for social workers and others that are respectively in contact with Roma from abroad, staying in Württemberg at the moment.

- ✓ Finding words that describe the work done for and with Roma without discriminating them (and to publish success stories/case studies that empower)

When looking at the Roma that arrive in Stuttgart from abroad, the following topics need to be stressed:

- ✓ Documents are missing
- ✓ High percentage of Roma can't read or write
- ✓ Some are mixing languages - seem not to know any language in its "pure" form
- ✓ Do not know the name of the Town-Hall that was responsible for their registered address in Serbia (as this is not the name of their village).
- ✓ Very open for spontaneous travel to another country, as they might get better help there.

Roma that arrived in Stuttgart share their issues about people from other countries who

have also arrived in Germany, but due to the above mentioned challenges these turn out to be even harder for them. They faced with several problems:

- ✓ Problems in registering permanent place of residence
- ✓ Problems of getting a bank account
- ✓ Missing knowledge and skills on how to apply for job
- ✓ Keeping track of their records (have one place / folder for all documents)

When speaking about the target group for the trial phase in Stuttgart and Württemberg that were Roma and Sinti from abroad that are in need of social assistance.

Methodology of gathering information was focus groups and interviews with social workers and other staff members of Diakonie Württemberg and its member organizations. They were all doing counseling work with Roma from abroad.

It seems that there are many individuals, semi-organised groups, companies, small and big organizations in Baden-Württemberg, that support their returnee in Serbia. No research has been done, but it can be assumed that the result of this support differs a lot. The partner organization concluded that further research and networking have to be done.



# ROMANIA



The social issue that was addressed in the project activities in Romania was an **early prevention of domestic violence in formal and informal educational structures**. Beside this one, this society is facing with the problems like child and women abuse and human trafficking.

## THE GENERAL SITUATION

In a society with a mostly archaic and patriarchal structure, domestic violence is mostly found as a form of abuse against women and children (66% of the victims are female, 35% minors and 31% minor females).



In many cases domestic violence is connected to alcohol consumption and poverty. Forms of domestic violence are to be found on all social levels, without any regard to education, financial status or social position.

On the other hand, there is almost no difference between the rural (51% of the cases) and the urban area (46% of the cases). As the Roma minority is facing strong challenges regarding education and poverty, it can be said that domestic violence remains in the ranks of the minority.

In the previous two years, marked by the Covid19 Pandemics, there was a very strong rise in numbers, regarding the cases of domestic violence. Studies have shown an increase in numbers up to 18%. The different lockdowns had a very negative impact on domestic violence, since victims and abusers were compelled to share the same living space for undefined periods of time.

The Romanian educational system is still based on the traditional and formalized level of transmitting information. The amount of theoretical knowledge that children have to learn gives teachers almost no opportunity to address social topics and challenges, like domestic violence, gender based violence, poverty, etc.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The partner organizations in Romania were Evangelical Academy from Transylvania and Women's Association from Sibiu.

**The Evangelical Academy Transylvania** was founded in 1991, as an independent platform for the ecumenical, interethnic and interdisciplinary dialogue. Its main purpose was to support the democratization process of Romanian society. Over 31 years of existence, the Academy addressed social, ecumenical, political, historical, and other. issues by organizing conferences, workshops, round tables and publishing.

The topic of the Roma minority was addressed on different occasions and on different levels over the years. In several occasions the work of the Academy tackled issues like: the Roma Holocaust, antiziganism, discrimination, integration and development of integrative structures. The

Academy organized courses for members of the minority in order to empower them to access funds regarding solving the social issues within the minority.

**The Women's Association in Sibiu** was founded in 1996, as a non-governmental association on the initiative of a group of women, mainly teachers. Their aim was to work on social and educational projects to help women and children, the victims of domestic violence.

The most important project of the Women's association is the women's shelter for victims of domestic violence, founded in 2007. The purpose of the shelter was to combat violence in the family and to improve the quality of life of women who were the victims of domestic violence. The Women's association is officially recognized and offers: identification and evaluation of cases; temporary accommodation; social, psychological and legal support, etc. The women are helped, or they can stay in the women's shelter until they are self-employed, or have their own apartment and a job.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

Due to the Covid19 Pandemic and lockdowns in Romania, two different steps of the Trial Phase in Romania had to be postponed and reorganized. The goal of the local projects in Romania was to introduce to people working in formal and in non-formal educational structures the topic of domestic violence and the way that it can be communicated on a child-friendly level.

The target group were professionals working in schools and non-governmental-organizations, where most of the children belong to the Roma community. Representatives of the local educational institutions, teachers from the urban and the rural areas and NGO members, exchanged their experiences and challenges in working with the issue of domestic violence. There was a meeting in Sibiu where stakeholders discussed education and prevention of domestic violence. The participants were representatives from School inspectorate, Proximity police Department, Experts on the juridical system and NGOs that are working with Roma.



At the same time they were introduced to different methods (role plays, group work, video materials, etc.) in order to be able to use these methods in their work with children. Experts, with educational and judicial background, presented and practiced with the participants open methodology that would allow children to recognize ways and possibilities to address domestic violence in their everyday lives. At the same time, the already existing network of public institutions, schools and NGOs were strengthened and widened. It was also presented as an example of good practice, such as Mošna village, the community with great results in working with domestic violence within Roma families. The majority of the population in this village are the Roma.

The workshops that were the part of project activities in phase 1, were focused on several issues:

- To explain the relationship victim - abuser explained to the youngsters,
- To present intervention methods in domestic violence adapted for youngsters,
- To discuss on vulnerability of the Romanian educational system

In a local phase 2, during December 2021 and January 2022, the experts went to schools and to NGOs to present and test the methods on a practical level, by working directly with youngsters. The topics that were covered by the workshops were: human values, sharing information about the judicial system and presenting the methods of violence protection.

A future challenge will be to find ways to allocate more time in the formal educational structures (public schools) in order to change the approach to domestic violence. The start would be to make a shift of perception regarding the different ways of approach and the possibilities of intervention in cases of domestic violence.

The project showed us that the long term change can be achieved only by education. There is a huge need to address the topic of domestic violence, but there are challenges regarding implementation of appropriate methods and dedicated time. At the same time, there is still a certain caution from the children and youngsters to speak freely about domestic violence coming from the lack of trust in authorities and the social stigma. One of the solutions can be to encourage and em-

power educators to address the topic of domestic violence in informal ways. Another problem is that children often disregard or do not even notice the emotional abuse or reduce the term of domestic violence to the parents or spouses.

This project was of crucial importance for children and the adults involved, to change their perspective of domestic violence.

Within the project *With and For Roma in the Danube Region*, Slovakian partners focused on the most necessary help to children in the first grade of elementary school - education. If such children are unsuccessful and therefore they go twice to the first grade of primary education, then it will unfortunately affect their entire lives negatively.

Based on the facts about the general circumstances, partner organizations decided to focus on tutoring primary school children in the first grade of primary school. Acquiring knowledge and mastering the curricula are the key elements to a brighter future of children from marginalized communities.



# SLOVAKIA



## THE GENERAL SITUATION

In Slovakia, the Roma represent about 10% of Slovakian population (450,000) and just over 10% of them are Christians. The Greek Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church A.C., the Baptist Church, Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are active in the Roma mission.

Roma in Slovakia very often finish their compulsory education (10 years in Slovakia) in the sixth or seventh grade. This means that they repeat some years of school. 10 years usually in-

cludes 9 years of primary school and the first year at secondary school. In Slovakia, more than 10,000 children fail each year (mostly first grade students). Teachers see this situation as that the children probably need more time to build up basic knowledge. guarantees them an opportunity for a more permanent job position. This system endures.

This situation affects how children perceive themselves and how they are perceived by classmates and the community. Among children from Roma settlements, only 50% continue their secondary education in regular schools. They have a problem with this, later in life. A large per-





centage of children from the settlements do not get into a normal school.

Many children from marginalized communities have never seen the dice and they can't draw.

Every 4th child in the Roma community is diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Statistically, this is not possible. Diagnosis is often in Slovak, in a language that they do not understand. The majority of children in schools for children with disabilities are Roma children. Stressful life has a fundamental effect on the failure of children in the school system.

Evangelical Church A.C. today operates among the Roma mainly in six localities in eastern Slovakia (Rankovce, Rožňava, Jelšava, Slavošovce, Dobšiná and Hostišovce). Its work is mostly focused on working with children, youth and families. There is significant support from the state, especially in segregated communities, where approximately 50% of Roma in Slovakia live.

Today, less than 1,000 people live in Rankovce, of which about 90% are Roma people who live in a segregated and deprived area of the village. In the past, the basic problems in the village was generational transmitted poverty. The unemployment is up to 100%, the families are very large with a significant percent of alcoholism and smoking within the children population. The Roma speak their Romani language and use Slovak only as their secondary language to communicate with the others. The elder people in particular, and e young children as well, do not speak Slovak at all.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATION

**Evangelical Diakonia in Slovakia** is established by the Evangelical Church and is in close cooperation with Church congregations in Slovakia. Therefore in this project Evangelical diakonia asked for cooperation Church congregation in Rankovce and its pastors Ľuboslav Beňo and Monika Beňová since they are well known for their good mission work with Roma people.

Since 2004, when the civil organization



called *For a Better Life* has been established in Rankovce, there have been many social activities organized in church premises. Many activities were started: activities aimed to support the school credit/grades of children, adult education and learning about cultural differences. Youth clubs, cooperation with other facilities, as well as cooperation with similarly oriented foreign organizations were opened.

Other civil organizations were also involved on an ongoing basis. There was an organization called Hope for Roma founded by volunteers from the USA, founded in order to help girls and women. Later on, it became the ETP Slovakia, which started its comprehensive and professional assistance to the local community at the premises of the church community center.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

The project With and For Roma in Danube Region is launched as a pilot project in a specific locality, in the church congregation Rankovce, where has been integrated the missionary work among the Roma since 1996. Along with it, there was also the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The project took place in the fall of 2021 and lasted for three months. The project was very limited by the Covid19 anti-epidemic measures and therefore it was difficult to find the right time to implement the project activities. The sessions were visited by 15 children, even though it was planned to be 30 of them.

The structure of the workshops was mostly the same. Children were greeted at the beginning, and after prayer and a Christian song everyone chose their own homework, which they did with the help of the facilitators. After the homework they played a game. The inspiration came from many various board games.

After the game, the children were cleaning the toys and washing their hands, had a snack and then left home.

An important feedback came from the local Primary school, where the teachers saw the significant improvement in school credits and grades of the children, in their motivation, etc. That was the problem during the past, that children had no time or possibility to prepare for school, so they needed some extra support in a neutral environment, like a school club, to get ready for school. It would be good if a similar project could take place for older children as well.

Project implementation in Serbia was divided into three project phases which covered several various types of activities: conference, seminar, training, workshops and publishing publication.

The topics that were addressed with project activities were: Gender based violence, prevention of domestic violence and violence in partner relationships, prevention of juvenile marriages, education of Roma children and cooperation with their parents, legal migrations and employment.

The participants involved were women from the Roma population, professionals that are working with the Roma, especially children, children and parents from the Roma community and unemployed young Roma.



# SERBIA



## GENERAL INFORMATION

In Serbia there is accurate statistical data<sup>3</sup> that gives the insight of the current status of Roma in the field of juvenile marriages, education, domestic violence, school drop out, unemployment, etc. That data was the foundation for planning and implementing the project activities:

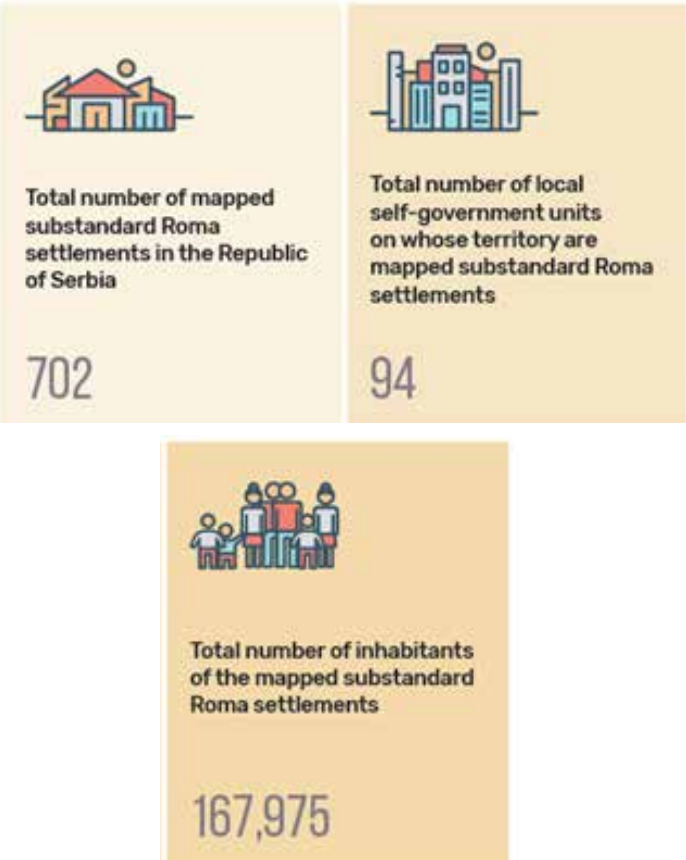
- ✓ 59% of the total active Roma population are not employed, which is significantly above the national average of 22.4%,
- ✓ 60% of girls from Roma settlements get married at an early age,
- ✓ 43% of Roma girls between 15 and 19 years of age drop out of school to get married (in the general population is 4%).),
- ✓ Only 80% of Roma children who were enrolled in the first grade of elementary school had previously attended preschool preparatory programs (in the general population, the coverage is 98%)<sup>4</sup>.
- ✓ Only 69% of Roma children started the first grade of primary school on time (in the general population the percentage is 97%).
- ✓ Only 64% of Roma children graduate from primary school (93% in the general population).
- ✓ Only 22% Roma children go to high school (89% in the general population).

<sup>3</sup> <https://serbia.un.org/en/103706-mapping-substandard-roma-settlements-accessing-risks-and-access-rights-republic-serbia>  
<sup>4</sup> [https://socijalnoukljudivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Ex\\_post\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_employment\\_strategy\\_for\\_the\\_period\\_2011-2020.pdf](https://socijalnoukljudivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Ex_post_analysis_of_the_National_employment_strategy_for_the_period_2011-2020.pdf)

## PARTNER ORGANIZATION

The partner organization in Serbia was **Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO)** from Novi Sad.

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization is a development organization that is guided by Christian ethical values. It contributes to building a society in which differences are respected. The core values of EHO are: human rights, equality and human dignity, peace and reconciliation, interfaith cooperation, solidarity, social justice and inclusion, sustainable development, responsibility, efficiency and transparency, and a participatory way of working.



EHO target groups are all vulnerable and marginalized groups whose human rights have been violated and/or were discriminated against. In its work, the organization cooperates directly with children and youth, people with disabilities, the elderly, migrants, Roma men and women, people with health problems, unemployed people, girls and women, young church leaders and civil society organizations. EHO also works with local communities, provincial and republic administration bodies and system institutions. The organization cooperates and works with all those in charge of implementing policies aimed to improve the position of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

In Serbia there were three local projects, all addressing different topics and different target groups.

In the **first local project** the addressed topic was prevention of domestic violence and violence in partner relationships. There was a training in Bačko Gradište, called **“My Healthy Emotional Connection”**, and it took place in July, 2021. Participants were both young and older women, mostly members of the Roma population. The group consisted of 28 participants, aged 15 to 65 years.

The training covered many very important issues: the difference between healthy and addictive emotional relationships; emotions and emotional literacy; communication skills, assertiveness and non violent communication; understanding violence and different types of violence; early pregnancies and early marriages. The training was implemented by Association the Power of the family from Novi Sad.

The second activity within this local project was the **The national conference “Prevention of youth marriages and domestic violence among members of the Roma population in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina”**.

The speakers at the conference were representatives of institutions as well as the civil society organizations. There were key persons from: the social welfare institutions on the level of Vojvodina province and the city of Novi Sad; Office

for Roma inclusion; EHO; Shelter for women and children, victims of domestic violence; SOS Women’s center; Associations of Roma; student organizations etc.



The video about the conference, held in Novi Sad in October 2021, is available here.

There are many conclusions and recommendations from these two project activities. The participants had a chance to discuss important issues, share experience, knowledge, emotions, good practice and to learn from each other.

Violence is not exclusively the problem of Roma communities. In order to be recognized and addressed in an appropriate way, the approach to it should be adapted and flexible to change. The importance of cross-sectoral cooperation for preventing violence and creating support mechanisms and services is crucial.





The causes of marriages among minors should be sought in poverty, social exclusion and deprivation of children, not in the traditional forms, culture and tradition of the Roma community.

It is very important to work on sensitivity for local cultural patterns and accordingly develop early prevention programmes. A key to breaking the Roma poverty cycle is to continue providing better education programmes.

Within the **second local project** in Serbia, there were several workshops, organized in September and October 2021:

- ✓ Workshop “Together we will succeed”
- ✓ Workshop “Your opinion matters”
- ✓ Workshop “My pet”
- ✓ Workshop “Educated women - stronger women”
- ✓ Workshop “Starting school on a new way”
- ✓ Workshop “Job and than family”
- ✓ Workshop “Kingdom of friendship”
- ✓ Workshop “Jasenka”

6 workshops were organized for parents, and there were 86 of them who participated. 10 workshops were organized for children on the following topics: friendship, the importance of physical activity, back to school, numbers, letters (Cyrillic and Latin) and other topics related to school content. The number of children who participated is 142.

The workshops were organized for small groups of 11 to 18 participants, and beside parents, target groups were girls, children and young women. The workshops included discussion, role plays, group work, games and lots of other different methods, in order to:

- ✓ promote healthy learning environment
- ✓ promote education
- ✓ strengthen trust and cooperation within the peer group
- ✓ show the importance of learning through fun and play
- ✓ raise awareness about parental partici-

- pation in children education
- ✓ prevent school dropouts
  - ✓ prevent reproductive health
  - ✓ develop empathy toward other human beings
  - ✓ show importance of education for women
  - ✓ prevent early marriages
  - ✓ preventi of peer violence

Pre-school programmes and language education is very important for preparing children for entering primary school. Provision of direct support to parents in order to motivate their children in the process of elementary education. Beside that, for better parenting skills, it should be provided more space and adequate tools so parents can practice their parenting competencies.



To support educational needs of children, the society should work on developing and maintaining the school dropout prevention programmes. Informing the parents about programs like “Second chance” and pre qualification programs can be very helpful and influence the life of young Roma. In order to motivate children to go to school, Roma children should go to non-segregated and inclusive schools which should assure the quality of their education.

During this second local project, in May 2022, there was a workshop with the 8th grade students of primary school “Dusko Radovic” in Novi Sad. It was implemented for 17 children with the aim to inform students about the final exam and enrollment in high school. There was discussion about the values of dual education and stu-

dents were faced with positive examples from their surroundings. The participants were very interested and active during the workshop. They showed their motivation to have life like their non Roma peers have. They said there is a way to get there, with proper education and qualification. For them it was very useful to have such support in such a stressful period of their lives - finishing primary school and enrolling in secondary education.

The **third local project** covered the issues of unemployment within the Roma population, legal migrations and the right to information.

The activities within this local project were:

- ✓ Training and the meeting with DIMAK “**The right to information about possibilities of legal migrations of the population of Serbia migrating to Germany after the Covid19 pandemic caused crisis**”, organized in March 2022.
- ✓ Two workshops in May 2022 with the topic of “**The right to information about legal possibilities to migrations and the consequences of illegal migrations**”. There were students from “Dusan Radovic” primary school, 45 in total, at both workshops.
- ✓ Publishing information material for the Roma population.

Beside these activities, there were two more workshops in Backo Gradiste village, both held in May 2022. The workshops are organized for 38 students with the aim to help them inform about Western balkan policy on legal migrations. The participants were also introduced about the procedure of getting working permissions in Germany. The agenda also covered topics about the dynamics and necessary steps for getting permission for legal migration while discussing positive examples from their surroundings.

EHO team collected information about the possibilities of legal migrations from relevant sources, the German Embassy and DIMAK<sup>5</sup>. In April 2021, EHO and DIMAK signed The Protocol of Cooperation. One of the results of this cooperation was an informative leaflet, made for the target population.

<sup>5</sup> German Information Centre for Migration, Training and Employment



This local project was tailored to support and contribute to:

- ✓ better understanding on motives and Roma migration patterns: permanent, temporary, seasonal, circular
- ✓ dissemination of information and motivation to take legal actions regarding the migration process and job searching on the labor market
- ✓ strengthening of development services in legal advices, consultancies and promoting positive effects of legal migration in Roma communities
- ✓ Networking with public institutions and CSOs in order to exchange practices and methodologies working with mobile Roma



# CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING LESSONS

According to all project activities, implemented thankfully to partner organizations from Romania, Germany, Slovakia and Serbia, it can be said that there are joint conclusions, learning points and recommendations:

- ✓ **Local relevance** - local engagement and addressing the issues on the local level empowers Roma to make their own voice heard.
- ✓ **There is no magic solution** - solutions requires adapted and flexible approaches and tools.
- ✓ **Networking** - in order to ensure a fluent flow of relevant information, there is a need for deepend intersectoral cooperation and exchanging practices on local, regional and international level, between public and private sectors.
- ✓ **Education** - there is a necessity to develop programmes and services regarding education, in order to sustain violence and school dropout prevention, so that the chain of poverty can be broken.

- ✓ **Dissemination** - sensibilization of public institutions and services for working with marginalized groups is essential for understanding poverty, violence and other crucial issues (e.g. arranged early marriages) in Roma communities.
- ✓ **Prioritizing** - there is a need of recognising issues that could/should be dealt with at the earliest point and empowering local actors (public and private) to act accordingly.
- ✓ **Dignity** - contributing to the change of traditional perspectives empowers marginalized people and communities to live aligned to their guaranteed human rights. That also encourages Roma population to defend themselves against discrimination and social stigma.
- ✓ **Continuity** - the experience gained and the lessons learned during the implementation of the project will help organizations to improve the design, implementation and monitoring of future actions and projects on local level and in the Danube Region.



# THE CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES IN OTHER DANUBE REGION COUNTRIES



## INTRODUCTION

Roma – Europe’s largest minority of 10-12 million people – are victims of discrimination and social exclusion. One in three is unemployed, 20 % are not covered by health insurance, and 90 % are living below the poverty level. Many face prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion in their daily lives<sup>6</sup>. They are marginalized and mostly live in extremely poor socio-economic conditions. This undermines social cohesion and sustainable human development, hampers competitiveness and generates costs for society as a whole.

The European institutions and EU countries must work together to improve the social inclusion and integration of Roma people by using all the respective instruments and policies at local, regional, national and European levels for which

they are responsible. Unfortunately, strong and proportionate measures are still not in place to tackle the deep-rooted problems facing a large proportion of the EU’s Roma population.

This is why, on 5 April 2011, the European Commission adopted an **EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020**. The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) unanimously backed the Framework on 19 May 2011. The European Council of 24-25 June 2011 also endorsed the Strategy committing the Member States to paving the way towards a more socially cohesive Europe by preparing and implementing their national Roma integration strategies. They have also underlined that the protection of fundamental rights, notably by combating discrimination and segregation, was essential for improving the situation of Roma people.

<sup>6</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance\\_EN.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf)



# MOLDOVA



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

According to the information collected by UNICEF<sup>7</sup> The Roma community is one of Moldova’s most disadvantaged minority groups. Most Roma families still live in poverty and lack the basic services they need, including access to healthcare and education. When talking about the Roma children, they face discrimination to the same extent adults do, being denied the right to a safe, healthy and educated childhood.

The problems Roma children have start early in their life. At birth, they are less likely to be registered. Because many lack the birth certificate that signals their right to a whole range of services, including early education programmes, which is a crucial issue for their development and growth.

**Only one Roma child out of five attend a pre-school programme, compared to four out of five children from the majority of population.**

At all levels of education, Roma children attendance rates are much lower. Stigma and discrimination are very common for this community and they affect the enrolment and the school attendance of Roma children. On average, they enter the educational system later and leave it earlier than others do.

Only every second Roma child is covered by primary and secondary education as opposed

to the majority (90 per cent) of non-Roma children. They also drop out of school significantly more often than their peers from non-Roma communities.

Child marriages may be perceived as a way to protect young girls, and as a valued tradition. In reality the situation is quite different. Such marriages deepen the disparities experienced by girls, and make their lives lacking opportunities. Child marriage and school drop-out are closely linked. Such marriages expose girls to the dangers of early pregnancy and childbirth, as well as a high risk of violence.

By the time they become adults, one in five Roma will be illiterate. UNICEF in Moldova is trying to help Roma children get an education.

Violence threatens children’s emotional well-being, future prospects, survival and health. Violence experienced or witnessed by a child at an early age can cause lifelong damage. It affects children’s physical and mental health and undermines their development as functional adults and good parents later in life.

Violence against children at home is a social norm and not addressed as it should be, even when it occurs in public. While few parents in Moldova believe that violence is necessary to raise a child, almost half still believe that beating is an acceptable form of discipline. Data shows that 16 percent of parents admit to beating a child younger than one year.

Poverty and poor living conditions, alcohol consumption, and the migration of parents where children are left behind, are increasing the risk of children being neglected, abused, or exploited.

Approximately 75 percent of children experience some form of physical and psychologi-

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/what-we-do/roma-children>



cal violence. Cases of violence are rarely reported. Unfortunately, services for victims are limited, and consequently, these boys and girls rarely receive the assistance they need. As a matter of fact, few parents have the necessary knowledge and skills to bring up their children in a positive manner.

Violence is also seen in schools. There are concerns about bullying, with almost 60% of adolescents participating at least once in a fight in the last year and/or say they have been harassed at least once in the last few months.

More than one third of Moldovan pupils, 13-15 year old, say they have participated at least once in a fight in the last year.

Beside UNICEF, there is **The Roma National Center**<sup>8</sup>, a non-governmental organization that protects and promotes the Roma rights in the Republic of Moldova. The Roma National Center is concerned about the situation regarding the respect of human rights and mistreatment of the minorities, especially the Roma community.

According to their data, The Roma in Moldova continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups and face a higher risk of being marginalized by state authorities as well as non-state actors. This is due to their under-representation in decision-making as well as low social conditions, high figures of illiteracy, high unemployment and the existence of social stigma and negative prejudices, in particular.

The main reason for the non-implementation of Roma rights is the lack of governmental policies. Even if recently some initiatives have started to be developed in Moldova, this is not sufficiently supported. The Republic has poorly designed programs, and there are no financial allocations. The development is slow and the implementations inefficient, without existing mechanisms.

Though the **Action Plan 2011-2015**<sup>9</sup> was adopted and the establishment of Roma Community Mediators at the community level is ongoing, the UN CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the insufficient resources available for its implementation. One positive milestone was the

8 [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/MDA/INT\\_CERD\\_NGO\\_MDA\\_78\\_9588\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/MDA/INT_CERD_NGO_MDA_78_9588_E.pdf)

9 <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-22/>

election in June 2015 of two Roma women to positions in municipal councils – a significant event given the profound institutional discrimination faced by Roma, particularly women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

UNICEF works together with education professionals, local NGOs and parents to make sure schools and preschools are good places for all children. It strives to address the inclusion and reintegration of Roma children into the education system. This organization promotes the value of education in Roma communities. Roma community mobilization is expected to help create greater understanding and trust between schools and families, ultimately increasing Roma children's school attendance.

UNICEF's work in Moldova supports the building of strong national child protection systems that work in the best interests of all children, including those the most vulnerable. The main aims of child protection are: keeping families together, access to justice and the prevention of violence against children.



# SLOVENIA



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

According to the 2002 Population Census, 3 246 persons stated that they were members of the Roma community and 3 834 persons stated that the Roma language was their mother tongue. According to the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for National Minorities, there are between 7 000 and 12 000 Roma living in Slovenia, which represents 0,5% Slovenian population<sup>10</sup>.

In May 2017, the government adopted a new **National Program of Measures for Roma Integration for the Period 2017-2021**<sup>11</sup>. An Action plan contains a number of measures to ensure greater access of Roma to education, employment, housing, healthcare and social security.

In 2018, the government proposed amendments to the **Roma Community Act**, providing for specific rights to housing, education and employment. However, the parliamentary adoption process was suspended due to the early national elections in June 2018. Although Slovenia now has a new parliamentary majority and government, the amendments have not yet been re-launched.

Discrimination against and social exclusion of a large proportion of the Roma community continues, especially in the southeast of the country. The government still does not officially collect desegregated data on minorities, and the consequent lack of reliable information about the size of the Roma population and their underlying

10 <https://reyn.eu/reynnationalnetworks/reyn-slovenia/>

11 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EU-R6804762019ENGLISH.pdf>

socio-economic conditions limits the ability to develop and execute targeted measures to address and improve their situation.

Roma children continue to be overrepresented in special needs schools and as recipients of integrated special needs assistance in regular schools. In the Ribnica Primary school, for example, Roma students in the school year 2016/17 made up only 4.3 percent of all pupils, yet 14.7 percent of all pupils receiving integrated special needs assistance within the classes were Roma.

Amnesty International has found that many asylum-seekers irregularly entering Slovenia are denied access to asylum, fined for irregular entry and forcibly returned – without any procedure and frequently in groups – to neighboring Croatia<sup>12</sup>.

The Slovenian authorities continue the practice of detention of unaccompanied children. Despite a 2016 government decision providing that unaccompanied children should be accommodated in alternative accommodation in student dormitories, official data indicate that in 2018 alone, at least 300 children were detained in the Centre for Foreigners in Postojna.

In Slovenia, there is **The Romani Early Years Network (REYN)**, a Europe-wide leading advocacy network that promotes professionalism in early years, access of Roma and Traveller children to quality early childhood development (ECD) services and more diversity in the ECD workforce. This includes a better representation of Roma and Traveller professionals. The network shares knowledge, promotes best practices, trains practitioners and works with members to achieve quality and equitable early childhood services.

12 *Ibid.*



The Network strives to include early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children, from birth to six years old, in the annual monitoring of the National Roma Integration Strategies by the European Commission (DG Justice). With various key partners REYN supports and monitors the work done by the different EU directorates (DG Justice, DG Employment and DG Education and Culture) on Roma and Travellers children.

The Network implements many activities, and some of them are:

- Trainings for educators and other relevant representatives from local/national level with thematic focus on developing high-quality and culturally sensitive early childhood education services for Roma families.
- Conferences, expert meetings, study visits.
- Short videos on the importance of the inclusion and cooperation with Roma ECEC professionals and on the importance of an inclusive learning environment.
- Workshops for children and parents in Roma settlements.
- Developing materials for children, parents and ECEC practitioners and (pre)school directors.
- Establishing local action teams in several environments which include actors at the local community level who encounter Roma families in their daily work and can contribute to more successful inclusion of Roma children and their parents into the education system, especially in preschool programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty international calls on the government of Slovenia to:

- Remove the distinction in legislation and other measures between “autochthonous” and “non- autochthonous” Roma communities, as this contributes to the continued discrimination experienced by some Roma communities and deepens their social exclusion;
- Adopt measures to ensure security to Roma people living in informal settlements;



- Adopt measures to ensure full access to water, sanitation and electricity for all Roma communities;
- Ensure that all asylum-seekers have access to fair and effective asylum procedures in accordance with the Slovenian International Protection Act and international law;

Here are some of the concrete results that REYN succeed to achieve within Roma community:

- Informed local community representatives and policy-makers on local/national level about the importance of quality education.
- Regular contacts between different actors from different sectors (education, health, welfare, etc.).
- Raised awareness of Roma parents on the importance of enrolling children in preschool and their competences for child’s development.
- Increased number of Roma children enrolled into preschool programmes.
- Higher quality of practice in preschool groups with Roma children.

# CZECH REPUBLIC



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

The Roma minority is one of ethnic minorities in the CR. The 2011 census registered a total of 13,150 Roma inhabitants, Roma language as their native language (or one of the native languages) stated 40,370 inhabitants. According to estimates by the ERRC from 2003 there are between 250 000 and 300 000 Roma people living in Czech Republic<sup>13</sup>.

Roma people came to Central Europe and the territory of today’s CR from the late 14th century. Roma in the CR are among the groups most affected by social exclusion, with all the negative consequences of this phenomenon (low education, high unemployment and crime). There is generally a strong anti-Roma mood among the Czech public with many anti-Roma strikes and demonstrations recently.

The largest group (75-85 %) are “Slovakian Roma” (called Rumungři, who came to Bohemia and Moravia after World War II. Other major branches of the Romani people are “Roma Vlachika” (about 10 %) who began to arrive from the Hungaria in the second half of the 19th century and the rest are Hungarian Roma and German Sinti.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dare-net.eu/introduction-to-roma-in-the-czech-republic>

According to qualified estimates by regional coordinators for Roma minority affairs, a total of 245,800 Roma lived in Czech Republic in 2016, which represents 2.3% of the overall population in the Czech Republic<sup>14</sup>. The Roma in the Czech Republic cannot be considered a homogeneous group, neither economically, nor regarding their social status. The Roma community in the Czech Republic mainly comprises Slovak and Hungarian Roma who entered the territory after the Second World War<sup>15</sup>.

Approximately one-third (100,000) of Roma in the Czech Republic are Slovak citizens. The Czech citizenship law, which came into force on 1 January 1993, makes citizenship conditional upon a prior two-year residency and five years without a criminal conviction. An amendment passed in June 1993 requires evidence of economic means and of stable accommodation. Although these measures are not in violation of international law, they have been criticized as discriminatory by the 1994 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting on Romany Issues. Roma without Czech citizenship are not entitled to free medical care or education, nor may they participate in the privatization process. They may also be deported at will by the authorities<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/978-1-83867-259-120191005/full/html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-5/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



For Roma people in the Czech Republic social exclusion started early. A 2018 report<sup>17</sup> estimated early school leavers in the Roma community at a very high 72 percent, compared to a national average of 6.7 percent. A 2012 study<sup>18</sup> found unemployment rates to be four times higher among Roma people than among non-Roma; one of the highest disparities seen in the eleven countries surveyed.

Roma children are still 12 times more likely than their non-Roma peers across the country to be educated in special schools offering inferior education – and much more likely than that in certain regions.

Issues between Roma and the majority population identified a questionnaire survey among Roma advisors and assistants conducted by the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention Ministry of Justice are divided into the following groups<sup>19</sup>:

- Social problems, which includes Roma unemployment or poor housing. Roma is accused of receiving social support as the only source of livelihood and a reluctance to get involved in the work process.
- Problems in civic coexistence, such as neighborly relations, noise and mess around the home.
- Crimes.
- Roma issues with drugs, alcohol and prostitution.
- Problems in communication between the Roma and the majority population and in negotiations with the authorities.
- Racism, intolerance and prejudice against the Roma population.

In November 2012 the Ministry of Education presented a list of anti-segregation steps to remedy the situation. Resort, for example, intended to focus on counseling, and improvement of the awareness of parents.

Mainstream schools argue that inclusive education is not just about the teaching of Roma pupils, but also physically disabled children with learning disabilities, foreigners or exceptionally tal-

17 [https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-czech-republic\\_en.pdf](https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-czech-republic_en.pdf)

18 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance\\_EN.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf)

19 <http://www.dare-net.eu/introduction-to-roma-in-the-czech-republic>

ented pupils. About 70 percent of teachers teach pupils with mild mental disabilities without the necessary qualifications.

Educators need to be better prepared to work with students in a diverse team. Such lessons often make it difficult for the high number of pupils in classes. Promoting inclusive education by the state and in the long term is, however, definitely worth it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Czech authorities should set clear, measurable and ambitious targets for transfers of children from special to ordinary education and for overall desegregation of the school system. With thousands of Roma children lost to the mainstream education system in the Czech Republic and condemned to a future as second-class citizens every year, the Council of Europe urges the Czech authorities to ensure that the next intake of children in the 2011-2012 school year will finally mark a clear change of direction<sup>20</sup>.

The civil society groups recommend the Government to continue to support recent policy moves promoting inclusion by further financing schools to develop their ability to serve multiethnic communities. This can be done by:

- training administrators, educators and paraprofessionals to work with children from diverse backgrounds,
- desegregating education, including closing those primary schools where Roma children are educated in worse conditions than non-Roma with a low success rate of continuing on to secondary education.

20 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/country-monitoring/czech-republic/>

# AUSTRIA



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

The 2001 Census recorded 4,348 Romani-speakers with Austrian nationality and 1,925 with other nationalities. However, the official estimate for the Roma population is 10,000 to 20,000, while many sources estimate the autochthonous community at 20,000 to 25,000. In addition, there are new immigrants<sup>21</sup>. The Roma are the only ethnic group which is officially recognized throughout Austrian territory.

The Burgenland Roma are mainly rural. The other Roma groups – Lovara (horse traders), Kalderas (tinkers), Gurbet and Arijje – and the Sinti are mainly city dwellers. The majority live in Vienna and eastern Austria. The Roma have their own strong religious beliefs and traditions, but down the centuries they have adopted various Christian denominations and Islam in order for their children to be regarded as legitimate by the authorities. The Kalderas, Gurbet and Lovara are part of the Vlach-Roma group, whose language is strongly influenced by Romanian. The Burgenland Roma speak Roman, a version of Romani. The Romani language is spoken by an estimated 80 percent of Roma in Austria.

The majority of Roma are city-based and many have assimilated. Most Gurbet and Arijje are Austrian citizens, as are most second-generation Kalderas. Many are self-employed in second-hand trading and other businesses. Roma are disadvantaged in education and achieve lower levels than the general population. A minority complete higher secondary education, and very few go on to higher education. But the situation has improved somewhat for children born after 1980.

21 <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/romagypsies/>

The second Roma Civil Monitor (RCM) report for Austria has found that the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) process there brought about a tenfold increase in the number of Roma-targeted ESF programmes implemented between 2015 and 2019, specifically those making it possible for civil society to empower Roma in accessing the labour market<sup>22</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Roma civil society groups recommend that the successful employment empowerment measures recently piloted should be taken up by the public labour market service and integrated into mainstream policies. Successful labour market integration depends on addressing the complex obstacles and discrimination facing Roma women and men, as well as on early intervention focusing on education, training and the transition from education to the labour market.

Housing should also be included in the current and future NRIS, and Roma-targeted programmes should be developed to improve access, based on research. Health care professionals should be made aware of the situation of Roma in Austria with regard to accessing care.

With respect to education, mediation by Roma in the schools should be further institutionalized and targeted education programmes should be supported. Content on representing Roma culture and history in textbooks at various levels should be developed with Roma organizations. Educators should be encouraged to use existing teaching resources about Roma, and classes in the Romani language should be offered to more Roma children. It should happen especially in Vienna, where the education authority should actively recruit such staff in collaboration with civil society.

22 <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-reports>



# BULGARIA

## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

Roma are formally Bulgaria's second largest minority group, representing approximately 325,343 or 5% of those who declared their ethnic identity during the 2011 census. However, estimates range widely and some sociologists claim the actual number of Roma in Bulgaria to be more than twice the official statistic<sup>23</sup>.

Roma began to settle in Bulgaria as early as the 13th century, coming from the Middle East and subsequently also from places such as Wallachia and Moldova. The three main groups of Roma today are Yerlii, Kardarashi and Rudari. Each is divided into subgroups, distinguishing themselves mainly by the dialect spoken and the traditional male craft.

While Bulgaria has achieved considerable reductions in infant mortality, its rate is still over 80% higher than the EU average (6.6 vs 3.6 deaths per 1000 live births in 2015). There is a significant fluctuation among regions and in settlements with concentrated Roma populations, with levels up to 200% higher than the national average.

Preterm births account for half of all infant deaths in Bulgaria and limited access to prenatal healthcare is one of the leading risk factors. In regions with a high percentage of Roma, less than half of pregnant women receive prenatal checkups before the third lunar month.<sup>[iii]</sup> The young age of these mothers additionally increases the risk of

<sup>23</sup> [https://reyn.eu/national\\_networks/reyn-bulgaria/](https://reyn.eu/national_networks/reyn-bulgaria/)

preterm birth. Ten percent of all live births in Bulgaria are teen pregnancies (compared to 1% for the EU), and this is an issue that disproportionately impacts the Roma.

Malnourishment is another health risk that puts Romani children at a disadvantage. The level of anemia among Romani children aged 6-11 months is 61% compared to 37% among ethnic Bulgarian children<sup>24</sup>. The relative share of Romani children aged 0-3 with growth delays (measured based on the World Health Organization's criteria for height-to-weight ratio) is 30% compared to 8% for ethnic Bulgarians. Stunted growth results in susceptibility to infectious diseases as well as in poorer cognitive, motor, social-emotional, and neurophysiologic development<sup>[iv]</sup>.

Half of Bulgaria's Roma live in illegal neighborhoods, with 80% of all residents in these neighborhoods lacking access to sewage and hot water. Many homes also lack running water and electricity<sup>[v]</sup>. Many live in fear of eviction<sup>[vi]</sup>. These deplorable conditions result in high incidences of preventable and chronic diseases among Roma children. They also affect their school attendance and economic potential.

At present, 23% of new entrants into Bulgaria's labor force are Roma or individuals living in marginalized communities. Roma currently experience great gaps in educational outcomes, with only half finishing junior high, less than 15% completing high school, and less than 1% earning a university degree. Cost barriers, teacher discrimination, pressure from social norms within Roma society, a lack of professional role models, and outdated curriculum and teaching meth-

<sup>24</sup> [Ibid.](#)

ods all influence this outcome.

To prepare for a possible future where Roma and individuals living in Roma communities make up 46-50% of Bulgaria youth, it is essential that targeted and long-term projects and policies address and reduce these educational gaps. The importance of early education in providing an equal start to school has been gaining recognition in recent years, with two years of preschool currently being mandatory.

The country's 1,894 kindergartens and preparatory groups at primary schools provide preschool education to 79% of all 3-6 year-old children. Impressively, enrollment among Romani children has increased from an estimated 45% in 2011 to 68% in 2015. Today, one in ten municipalities offer free or low-cost kindergarten during at least the two mandatory preschool years. Yet in the absence of a national policy to remove kindergarten fees, financial constraints continue to limit the participation of many children from disadvantaged communities.



The ongoing optimization of educational infrastructure in response to urban migration has resulted in a 10% reduction in the number of kindergartens during the period 2011-2016. Villages, where Roma are concentrated, are particularly affected by this process. Urban ghettos suffer disproportionately from a lack of free places at kindergartens.

For Romani children to achieve better cognitive, social, and emotional competencies, the learning environment and kindergarten teacher preparedness may need to improve. Currently, 50% of kindergarten teachers are aged 50 and older, and there are few high quality professional development opportunities available. Discriminatory attitudes persist among one in every five kindergarten teachers. Very few teachers are of Roma origin, yet entire kindergartens are attended by only Romani children. Greater emphasis may be needed on working with Romani parents to sustain their engagement in children's learning after enrollment in kindergarten.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offer positive role models in the early childhood development of Roma children by encouraging and supporting students from Roma communities in their pursuit of a career in professional fields such as teaching and nursing
- Improve the quality of services for young Romani children through professional development opportunities such as training, local and international exchanges, and the dissemination of international best practices
- Integrate healthcare and early education more effectively, such as through the production of handbooks for educators on how to help parents maintain a healthy diet for their children using easy to prepare, low-cost recipes
- Unite advocacy efforts to improve access, quality and results for Roma children by supporting its members in promoting success stories and by becoming a respected source for policy recommendations and thought leadership.



# UKRAINE



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND MAIN ISSUES

In Ukraine, it is estimated that there are up to 400,000 Roma people. According to the OSCE Situation Assessment Report (2014), Roma are a heterogeneous community that lives in different regions of Ukraine. The largest concentrations of Roma live in Transcarpathia, Donetsk, Luhansk, Odesa, Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Cherkassy and Poltava<sup>25</sup>.

Major challenges that Roma people in Ukraine face with are:

- low education level of Roma;
- low incomes and high unemployment;
- poor housing and limited access to social and health care services;
- human rights violations, hate speech and discrimination.

The data show that 24% of Roma respondents reported having no education, 16% have no primary education, and 37% have incomplete secondary education. According to the mentioned survey, 63% of Roma are unemployed (unemployment among women being even higher – 83%), with a further 22% working only part-time<sup>26</sup>.

These numbers clearly demonstrate that the Roma in Ukrainian are disadvantaged. Romani children suffer the effects of all of these issues to

an even larger extent as poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, malnutrition, and facing prejudice from a very early age.

Many Roma families lack not only the basic material possessions (such as shoes and adequate clothing) to send their children to kindergarten or school but also do not see the long-term value of the educational system, especially one where their children will most certainly face prejudice and discrimination. As many Roma families have children at a young age, they also lack the necessary parenting skills and have virtually no access to relevant training programs. Many children are forced to leave school early both because of prejudice and bullying and to help their families generate income. Many Romani girls drop out of school due to early marriage.

As a result, an overwhelming majority of Roma children do not receive adequate care and development assistance, especially during pre-school and early school years, which are crucial in laying the foundation for a successful future. Most health care and social service providers either do not want to work in the Roma communities or lack necessary capacity and resources to do so. This results in systemic neglect of the Roma children's basic medical and social rights. Combined with malnutrition, physical and mental abuse, also contributes to further alienation of Roma from the 'mainstream' society starting from a very early age.

According to the crisis in Ukraine, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture – ERIAC has taken immediate action to document

the experiences of Roma refugees from Ukraine and the work of Roma organizations and activists in response to the humanitarian crisis<sup>27</sup>.

In order to record and document the situation of Roma fleeing Ukraine as well as Roma-led actions to help refugees on the borders of Ukraine, ERIAC has deployed documentation teams in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The teams are building a digital archive to document the Roma historical memory of the war, focusing on stories of survival, resistance, solidarity, and humanity, as well as providing reliable evidence of cases of mistreatment and discrimination experienced by Roma refugees.

27 <https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Romani Early Years Network (REYN) Ukraine is hosted by the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation. The main purpose of REYN Ukraine is to create a national network of professionals and paraprofessionals involved in providing and facilitating Early Childhood Development and Care services for Roma children and families. REYN Ukraine focuses on the professional development of its members and promoting exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Besides, REYN Ukraine will look for new capacities and opportunities to develop and implement new projects and initiatives for Roma communities and young children. The network consists of more than 100 individuals, including Roma NGOs representatives and activists, early childhood professionals, practitioners and teacher assistants.



25 <https://reyn.eu/national-networks/ukraine/>  
26 Ibid.



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# IMPRESSUM

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