



ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

CHALLENGES, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

ROMA YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

A report prepared within the Roma Youth Voices project
2020

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KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

- Roma populations are demographically different from the majority European populations as it is noticeably younger throughout Europe.
- Roma youth are diverse from different perspectives. Because of their heterogeneity, there is a need for differentiated Roma youth policies according to the different needs of Roma youth groups.
- Roma youth do not enjoy the same rights and benefits as any other EU youth citizens because of their limited access to goods and services mainly due to the antigypsyism they encounter, and their age.
- There is a huge gap between the content of the multitude of youth participation frameworks and standards (i.e., international, European, national) and the actual level of participation of Roma youth.
- Roma youth engage in different forms of civic and political activism (i.e., protest, NGO work, etc.); Roma youth and civil society organizations have become more successful in expressing their concerns and opinions on public issues that matter for them.
- Roma youth are excluded from EU level youth initiatives and programs (i.e., Erasmus+, European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, etc.). Based on respondents' answers to this research it is clear that Roma youth do not benefit as much as their counterparts from EU programs targeting youth.
- Policy documents talk about Roma girls and children, but not specifically about Roma youth. It is thus important to reflect on why this is the case: is it because of the perception that Roma youth are part of mainstream youth policies, or because they are not a priority for the EU and national governments? Or conversely, are Roma youth sufficiently integrated so that no further targeted actions are needed to serve them?
- The main concerns from Roma youth perspectives are related to racism and discrimination (73% of respondents mentioned this), access to education, training and schooling, employment, participation in public and social life and combating hate-speech and hate-crime.
 - 95% of the respondents observed or encountered discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at Roma.
 - Despite policy efforts, discrepancies between Roma and non-Roma with regards to access to education and completion rates are still high.
 - Employment opportunities for young Roma are shaped by their level of education and the high level of discrimination they face from employers.
 - Roma youth have issues accessing both mainstream youth and Roma related political representation structures.

KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

- Friends, family and the nearby (local) NGO are the three most frequent categories of (social) actors and structures that Roma youth turn to for support in addressing their concerns and needs.
- Roma youth are active citizens, highly involved in the civic and political life of their communities. The most frequent civic activities they engage in include participation in various workshops, seminars, events on Roma related topics, voting (e.g., at the European, national, local level); organizing and signing petitions; organizing and attending protests against certain unjust practices or for changing/supporting some specific pieces of legislation, etc.
- What motivates Roma youth to participate in civic and political life is the idea they can be part of changing certain things.
- The most important five main barriers mentioned by Roma youth when it comes to their participation in public and political life refer to:
 - 1 lack of space for Roma youth in mainstream youth structures;**
 - 2 lack of trust by young people in state and public institutions;**
 - 3 negative social attitudes towards young people in general;**
 - 4 insufficient resources (i.e., time, financial means);**
 - 5 minimal power given to young people to initiate change.**
- Roma youth expect civil society organizations (both Roma and mainstream youth NGOs) and their national and local governments to support their participation and to be more inclusive of Roma youth.

PROJECT DETAILS AND METHODOLOGY

This report is a result of the work of a number of organizations involved in the Roma Youth Voices Project lead by the Phiren Amenca International Network between 2019 and 2020.¹ Through its work Phiren Amenca interacts with a great number of young Roma coming from all over Europe. The organization works with Roma youth of diverse academic backgrounds, language skills and international experiences but also with young Roma coming from segregated and impoverished areas, who, as participants in the organization's activities, often leave their city or country for the first time. In order to better shape European projects and institutional agendas to respond to the importance of Roma youth participation, Phiren Amenca conducted a research about the different challenges, needs and potentials Roma youth face.²

The Roma Youth Voices project was initiated in 2018 by Phiren Amenca International Network, ternYpe Roma Youth Network and their partners aimed to invest into a grassroots social movement of Roma and non-Roma youth. The objectives of the project were to seek reconciliation, social justice, solidarity and respect between Roma and non-Roma, and to take actions against Roma targeted stereotypes, antigypsyism³, and racism. Among its main activities, the project focused on raising awareness of and campaigning for respect, dialogue and solidarity between Roma and non-Roma; capacity-building of Roma youth organizations on local and national level; raising voices, mobilization and participation of Roma youth in policy-making processes; and strengthening the role of young people and youth organizations in the context of national and European policies targeted at Roma and non-Roma youth.

Through this project it is envisioned that Roma youth (and their organizations) will become empowered to advocate for their own needs, will contribute to challenging stereotypes and racism (through organizing campaigns, building dialogue between Roma and non-Roma, building civil society alliances for solidarity and defense of human rights). We also hope that they will become aware of existing European and national policy initiatives related to Roma. Last but not least, the project aims to enhance the recognition by decision makers and civil society of Roma youth organizations as agents of change and partners, and at the same time to raise awareness of policy- and decision-makers about the needs, challenges and potential of Roma youth.

¹ For more details about the project see the Project page at: https://phirenamenca.eu/category/projects/roma_youth_voices/

² Position Paper of the Roma Youth Networks on the Post-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

³ Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as "Gypsies." This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates Roma with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism (IHRA Working definition of Antigypsyism 2020).

PROJECT DETAILS AND METHODOLOGY

This report presents the findings from an online questionnaire conducted with young Roma (activists and non-activists, volunteers and students, between 15 and 35 years old) from the European Union (see Annex for specific questions). The main aim of the questionnaire was to assess the needs, challenges and opportunities for Roma youth civic and political participation (volunteering, politics, civil society work, etc.). Additionally, the questionnaire focused on the real and perceived obstacles that Roma youth encounter in their civic and political participation and what would be needed for that participation to be successful and effective. The survey was based on the assumption that the opinions and input of Roma youth is most valuable, as it will help policy-makers and NGOs address issues of interest to this group and make better informed policies, projects and programs to support them. Project partners and Phiren Amenca facilitated the distribution of the survey.

The survey collected **290 responses**, with most of the respondents (around 90%) coming from the countries partnering with the Roma Youth Voices Project as follows: 72 from Hungary, 87 from Romania, 41 from Bulgaria, 41 from Slovakia and 20 from Spain⁴. As far as the age distribution is concerned, out of the total number of respondents 38% of them were between 19-24 years old, 27% were between 25-29, 20% were between 15-18, and 15% between 15-19 years old. In terms of gender, 61% of the respondents identified themselves as females, 5 respondents as non-binary and the rest as males.

In terms of occupational status, 34% of the respondents stated they were employed (in an almost equal proportion of female-male); 46% were students, with females outnumbering males 2 to 1 in this group. 5 respondents identified themselves also as volunteers, 5 as unemployed, 4 as not in education, and 7 as 'other' (28 did not answer the question). Around 42% of the respondents had or were pursuing a higher education degree; 32% were attending high school, and 12% secondary education, while the rest had other educational backgrounds.

Some of the limitations of this research refer to the varying number of respondents in the different countries, despite the fact that the survey was translated into 9 languages (English, Bulgarian, Czech, French, German, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish) and was open from November 12th, 2019 until April 10th, 2020. Self-selection among the respondents was one of the aspects that limited the reach of this kind of research based on an online survey open to the public and distributed through e-mails and social media. Considering the number of European Roma youth, we cannot claim that the sample is representative, yet it fully reflects the personal views and opinions of the respondents and their social demographics and profiles (i.e., employment status, education level, etc.). Despite these limitations, the research fills in a niche for understanding the challenges and perspectives of European Roma youth as there is no previous research dedicated entirely to Roma youth participation.

⁴ The remaining respondents presented the following situation:

Slovenia 1, Greece 1, Poland 1, Czech 2, Belgium 2, Austria 2, Croatia 2, UK 4, Finland 5, Germany 6.

⁵ For more details on the survey see: <https://bit.ly/3bdqeJX>

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the current state of democracies across the world and in Europe, young people are expected to be involved and to contribute to the functioning of their societies by participating in established structures and political institutions; as well as in the public and political life of their communities.⁶ Despite these expectations, in the last decade it has been shown that there is a trend of youth disengagement from traditional forms of political participation (e.g., political party membership, turnout in elections).⁷ Roma youth, especially at the local level, reported in the survey to be disengaged and detached from processes and structures of formal politics such as party-membership, political campaigning but they participate in civic life through demonstrating, volunteering, voting, and others.

This report starts by describing the main standards and frameworks aimed to foster youth participation in public and political life in Europe. It continues by providing several considerations in defining Roma youth, and reflects on the importance of and the need for Roma youth participation. The report also looks at the main challenges Roma youth face and how these contribute to boosting their activism and participation. Finally, it digs into the specificities of Roma youth participation by providing a short overview on how the Romani movement incorporates youth and what the positionality of youth is in such a diverse movement.

⁶ Barrett, M. (n.d). Young People's Civic and Political Engagement and Global Citizenship. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/young-peoples-civic-and-political-engagement-and-global-citizenship>

⁷ Kitanova, M. (2020) Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23:7, 819-836, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951

2. STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORKS AIMED TO FOSTER THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH

The importance of youth participation is recognized in multiple international and European agreements and frameworks. According to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, participation as a human right includes the right to participate in government and free elections, in the cultural life of a community, the right to peaceful assembly and association, and the right to form trade unions.⁸

In the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**⁹, participation is a core principle. This states that all people under 18 have a right to have their voice heard in all matters affecting their lives, the right to express themselves freely and to receive and share information.

The **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities** points out that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life; have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation, and that States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.¹⁰

More relevant to political participation is the **Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Resolution on Youth Participation in Democracy**. The Resolution, among other:

(4) Requests parliaments to create the necessary platform for youth participation in the democratic process by providing a basic level of education that is equal for everyone, with the same opportunities for boys and girls;

(7) Also calls on the IPU, parliaments, youth organizations and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen efforts aimed at achieving appropriate representation and participation of youth in decision-making bodies, bearing in mind that girls, boys, young women and young men are all entitled to the same rights;

(10) Calls on parliaments to ensure that young people with disabilities and those who are socially and economically underprivileged are afforded equal opportunities to participate fully in society;

(13) Calls on parliaments to develop practical measures (such as the possible introduction of quotas for young people) to increase the participation of young people in parliament and other representative bodies, while respecting the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy and equality;

(15) Urges States, parliaments, parliamentarians, political parties, the IPU and youth organizations to promote greater participation by girls and young women by taking measures aimed at promoting role models and facilitating better reconciliation of work and family life;

⁸ See The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), available online at: <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁹ See The Convention on the Rights of the Child, available online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

¹⁰ See The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, available online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx>

(17) Calls on States, parliaments, parliamentarians, political parties, the IPU and youth organizations to take targeted action to enhance the participation of young people in political parties and elections at the local, national and regional levels;¹¹

Without any specific reference to youth, Article 15 of the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**¹² stipulates that State Parties “shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them”. More specifically, the Commentary on The Effective Participation of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Cultural, Social and Economic Life and In Public Affairs states that “persons belonging to national minorities can be involved in public affairs through a number of arrangements, such as representation in elected bodies and public administration at all levels, consultative mechanisms or cultural autonomy arrangements. Particular attention should be paid to the balanced representation of women and men belonging to national minorities¹³ however, again, no specific reference is made to youth.

The Council of Europe has authored several documents that contribute to creating an environment for civil participation, such as:

- the **Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**;
- the **Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents**;
- **Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers** to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making;
- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers** to member states on the legal status of non-governmental organizations in Europe;
- the **2009 Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process**;
- the **European Charter of Local Self-Government** on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority;
- **Recommendation Rec(2001)19 of the Committee of Ministers** to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life.
- The Congress of **Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**
 - Resolution 333(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities”,
 - Resolution 346(2012) on “youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement”
 - Resolution 319(2010) on the “integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods”

¹¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, The 122nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Resolution on Youth Participation in the Democratic Process”, Bangkok, 122nd IPU Assembly, 1 April 2010, <<http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/122/res-3.htm>>.

¹² Council of Europe, “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report”, Strasbourg, February 1995, p. 6, <<https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf>>.

¹³ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, “Commentary on the Effective Participation of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Cultural, Social and Economic Life and in Public Affairs”, 27 February 2008, p. 6, <<https://rm.coe.int/16800bc7e8>>.

In recent years, the **Council of Europe** has developed a number of initiatives that aim to promote the idea and importance of **Roma participation and Roma youth participation** in policy and decision making. This resulted in increased awareness and understanding among key stakeholders of the participation of these groups in politics and public life. Some of the available policy initiatives, tools and mechanisms included:

- The Roma Youth Action Plan¹⁴ and the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Roma Youth Action Plan 2016 – 2019 of Youth Department of the Council of Europe¹⁵
- The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020¹⁶
- The Thematic Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Travelers Issues (2016-2019)¹⁷
- The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Resolution 366 (2014) on Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels¹⁸
- The Roma Youth Participation in Action study¹⁹
- The Dialogue with Roma and Travellers Civil Society Recommendations for the transition of Roma youth from education to employment
- The thematic recommendations and conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers Issues

The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life²⁰ points out that “the active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society”.

¹⁴ For more information see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/home>

¹⁵ For more information see: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806926ac>

¹⁶ For more information see: <https://rm.coe.int/1680702428>

¹⁷ For more information see: <https://rm.coe.int/1680684b5e>

¹⁸ For more information see: <https://rm.coe.int/168071950b>

¹⁹ For more information see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/roma-youth-participation-in-action>

²⁰ See The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, available online at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680702379>

Within the European Union, Roma specific frameworks have been developed such as:

- **EP 2017/2038(INI)** – this calls on the Commission, the Member States and local authorities to design strategies on the basis of consultations with Roma representatives and NGOs, and to involve them in the running, monitoring and evaluation of mainstream programmes at all levels; to promote the establishment of independent Roma civil organizations and public institutions and the empowerment of a young, progressive Roma leadership; to encourage and support the effective participation of Roma women in public and political life and to enhance their participation in policy and decision-making;
- **Communication COM/2018/785** - States that there is a need for dedicated measures to strengthen Roma voices in the policy process (i.e., through political participation in the form of community action; through promoting Roma participation in professions in which they are underrepresented; and through supporting Roma engagement with local authorities and civil society).
- **Council Recommendation 2013/C 378/01** – Supports the active citizenship of Roma by promoting their social, economic, political and cultural participation in society; refers to equal access to mainstream public employment services, [...] and, where appropriate, promotes employment opportunities within the civil service.
- **The 10 Common Basic Principles** on Roma Inclusion 2009 – refer to the involvement (i.e., through input of expertise, consultations) of Roma people (experts and civil servants) at every stage of the policy making process at both national and European level.

The selected frameworks and guiding principles listed above are not exclusively targeting Roma youth. While both Roma participation and youth participation are recognized in multiple international and European agreements and frameworks, most of these have not been translated into concrete strategies, programs or specific policies with regards to Roma youth participation.

Among the variety of actors and stakeholders involved in issues affecting Roma youth, the Council of Europe (through the Roma Youth Action Plan), and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (through the Action Plan for Roma and Sinti) have been some of the leading institutions in promoting youth participation and participation-related capacity building activities for Roma youth. Such practices have had important effects in terms of Roma youth participation and have created a path for more substantive work on Roma youth at the European and national level.

3. DEFINING ROMA YOUTH

The European Union does not have an official definition for the specific period in life when a person is considered to be "young". For example, the previous EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) did not operate with a clear definition but rather allowed Member States to define it based on their own understanding of youth. However, specific EU funded programs on youth, such as the Erasmus+, put forward a clear age range and target young people between 13 and 30 years old. In England, the Children and Young People's Unit covers an age range of 0-25 (children and young people). Similarly, the Netherlands does not draw a distinction between children and young people, focusing on the age range of 0 to 25. In Estonia, youth ranges from 7 to 26 years old, Spain considers young to be those between the ages of 14 and 30, or even up to 32 or 34. Roma youth organizations, such as Phiren Amenca, define youth as those with aged between 16/18 and 30/35.

These blurred boundaries between children and youth can have both positive and negative consequences for youth policy. On the positive side, they ensure that there is a continuous transition between policies targeting children and those targeting young people. On the negative side, they result in the policy focus drifting away from young people to children. The Council of Europe's 'European Framework for Youth Policy'²¹ sheds some light on why making a distinction between children, middle and late adolescence, and post-adolescence youth periods matters in terms of policy responses (see table below).

Table youth transition phases and policy responses

GROWTH PHASE	CHILDHOOD	EARLY ADOLESCENCE	ADOLESCENCE	POST-ADOLESCENCE
	-11 yrs	12 - 17 yrs	18 - 24 yrs	25 yrs -
TRANSITION ISSUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- security- development support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- citizenship education & training- early prevention of social risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- institutional participation citizenship action- life management- labour market integration- risk prevention, harm reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- independence- facility formation- labour market stabilisation
POLICY RESPONSE	CHILD CARE	YOUTH WORK	INTEGRATED YOUTH POLICY	

²¹ Council of Europe. European Framework for Youth Policy. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/european-framework-for-youth-policy-eng/16809096b6>

In conceptualizing **youth** this research adopts a sociological perspective and argues that the category of **youth** is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Roma youth are diverse from the perspective of age distribution and policy responses - different age groups within Roma youth have different needs.

From a socially constructionist perspective, defining Roma youth and its multiple dimensions brings with it additional challenges. In some Roma communities, the status of a young person is defined based on their marital status. Specifically, if someone between 18-35 years old is married and has children, he/she is not considered young anymore within and by the respective community. In other Roma communities, the status of the household determines if one is considered young or not - if youth are married and live with one of the couple's relatives, they are considered young in the community, whereas if they live by themselves, they are no longer considered young. In yet other communities, many Roma do not have the right or the chance/opportunity to be young, with parents and relatives pressuring their children to give up their youth and establish a family at an early age.

From a demographic point of view, projections show that the rate of Roma population in the general population is increasing²² and therefore the necessity to address the needs and challenges of Roma youth becomes imperative considering the potential they carry for the society.

As mentioned above, when setting policy there is a need to consider the heterogeneity of Roma youth. This means there should be differentiated sets of policies targeting Roma youth so that these address the needs of different sub-groups within this population (i.e., disadvantaged young Roma, young Roma women, young Roma people with disabilities, etc.). When it comes to Roma youth, intersectionality should also be a consideration: LGBTQIA+ issues, mobility (i.e., migration) and social stratification should be of special consideration. However, the particularities of Roma youth in each geographic location should be considered and represented within the broader European Roma population. Below are several elements that we believe contribute to defining Roma (youth) when developing targeted policies.

■ *Roma* as a term is used and recognized throughout this research as a variety of linguistic and cultural characteristics which come together to reflect the diversity of multiple groups (some of which do not identify themselves as Roma per se but are affected by antigypsyism): i.e., Roma, Sinti, Kalé, Travellers, Gens du voyage, Beash – as the main groups in Europe; and/or, kalderashi, blacksmiths, etc., as specific groups at the national level. Such differences should be considered when defining and targeting a group in a specific country. This diversity adds another layer of differentiation in the sense that some communities are more open and liberal whereas some are more traditional and conservative (i.e., Gabor group in Romania).

■ Roma are generally categorized as poor people, which results in a misconstrued generalization that all Roma are poor. Such deductions might derive from the low socio-economic status in which most Roma live for years but do not reflect the general status of the whole Roma population.

■ Self-perception of Roma identity is based on individual basis and not on how the others define *Romani-ness*. Therefore, communities which do not identify as Roma or even Romani, such as Egyptians, Travellers, Beash etc. should be respected for their choice.

²² In Slovakia by 2020, the share of Roma children in the child component of the Slovak population will increase from the present level of 14% to about 17% by 2025. By 2050, the population of ethnic Bulgarians is expected to shrink to 800,000, while the number of Bulgarian Roma is expected to crest 3.5 million. A 2010 projection indicated that 20% of Hungary's population and 40% of its

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF ROMA YOUTH

Participation is a basic principle of democracy. It states that if there is a matter that affects someone's life, they should have the right to express their views on that matter, in order to influence what is being done about it. There are many avenues for participation, for example being part of civil society organizations, such as NGOs or youth councils; attending protests or public meetings; digital participation; taking part in citizens' initiatives or consultations; power sharing between young people and adults, etc. Participation is also about voting, standing for election and having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity, and, where necessary, the support, to participate in and influence decisions; and engaging in actions and activities in order to contribute to building a better society.²³

According to the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process²⁴ there are four gradual levels of participation, from least to most participative. These are information, consultation, dialogue, and partnership. As such, access to information is the basis for all subsequent steps in the involvement of civil society, NGOs and individuals in the political decision-making process. Consultation is a form of initiative where the public authorities may ask NGOs, individuals and civil society for their opinion on a specific policy topic or development. Consultation usually involves the authorities informing citizens of current policy developments and asking for comments, views and feedback. The initiative for this dialogue can be taken both by public authorities and civil society and can be broad (i.e., public hearings) or collaborative (i.e., leading to joint recommendations). A partnership meanwhile implies shared responsibilities in each step of the political decision-making process from agenda setting and drafting, to decision and implementation of policy initiatives. It is the highest form of participation. At this level, the civil society sector and public authorities come together in close cooperation.

Most of the time, the term participation refers to Roma youngsters (mainly children) only as "beneficiaries" of different policies, programs, projects and measures (i.e., education programs) instead of equal partners.²⁵

²³ Barrett, M. (n.d). Young People's Civic and Political Engagement and Global Citizenship. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/young-peoples-civic-and-political-engagement-and-global-citizenship>

²⁴ See Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, available online at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/code-of-good-practice-for-civil-participation-in-the-decision-making-process-en.pdf>

²⁵ The newly launched Roma Strategic Framework (2021-2030) clearly addresses Roma youth. "The new Framework recognizes the importance to invest into the empowerment and participation especially of Roma youth and Roma women. Therefore, the European Commission and Member States need to strengthen and fund the work of civil society, especially of Roma youth organizations." Vivian Isberg, TernYpe International Roma Youth Network.

Phiren Amenca breaks down the participation of Roma youth to several dimensions:

- participation as beneficiaries and targets of policies, programs, projects and measures;
- participation as civil society representatives;
- participation as representation in European and national level youth and Roma structures (including in public administration);
- political participation of youth as voters and candidates.

Roma youth participation in policies that affect them is particularly important for a number of reasons. The most important is that through political participation (whether formal or informal) is a way of tackling antigypsyism. For example, through political participation Roma youth will gain experience and strengthen their capacity to deal with issues that affect them and can go on to become political actors, decision-makers and activists who can articulate their interests (both as Roma and as youth) regarding the political agenda of their respective communities.

5. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES ROMA YOUTH FACE?

Roma youth do not enjoy the same rights and benefits as other EU youth citizens (see EU-MIDIS II, FRA, 2018) because of their limited access to goods and services mainly due to the antigypsyism they encounter, and their age. Antigypsyism has a long-term impact in diminishing Roma youth confidence, and in setting higher aspirations by Roma youth for themselves, but it can also result in the self-exclusion of Roma youth from society. Meanwhile, age discrimination leads to a it is perception that youth are being passive beneficiaries and not active agents capable of taking decisions regarding the policies that affect them).

“It seems that the social and political participation of the Roma youth is not important enough for the majority of people. I hope that in the near future the well-educated and talented young Roma will have the opportunity to be involved in public issues on the level of decision making. This could help the credible representation of Roma issues. It is important to mention that the work of the NGOs is not effective enough if they are working alone on this situation”.

(Roma youth, Hungary)

Responses to the questionnaires in our survey show that Roma youth have a variety of issues they would like to pay attention to, or they are concerned about.

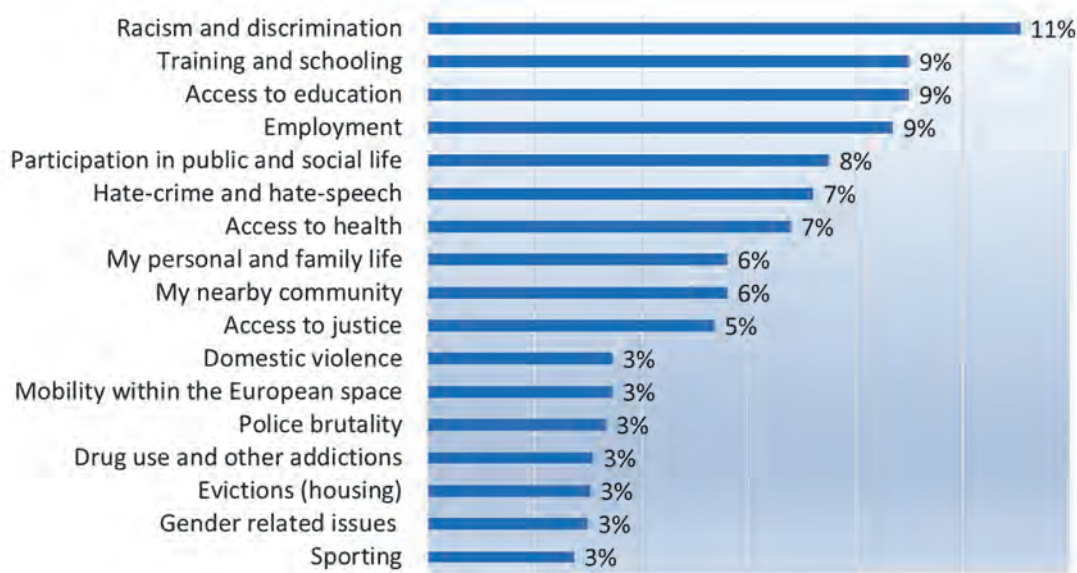


Figure 1. What are the main concerns for you as a Roma youth?

The figure above shows that the **main most frequent concerns for Roma youth** are related to racism and discrimination – for 73% of the respondents; access to education, training and schooling – for 59% of the respondents; employment – for 57%; participation in public and social life – for 49%; combating hate-speech and hate-crime – for 47%, and so on.²⁶ The next sections of this report will go into more depth on some of these issues.

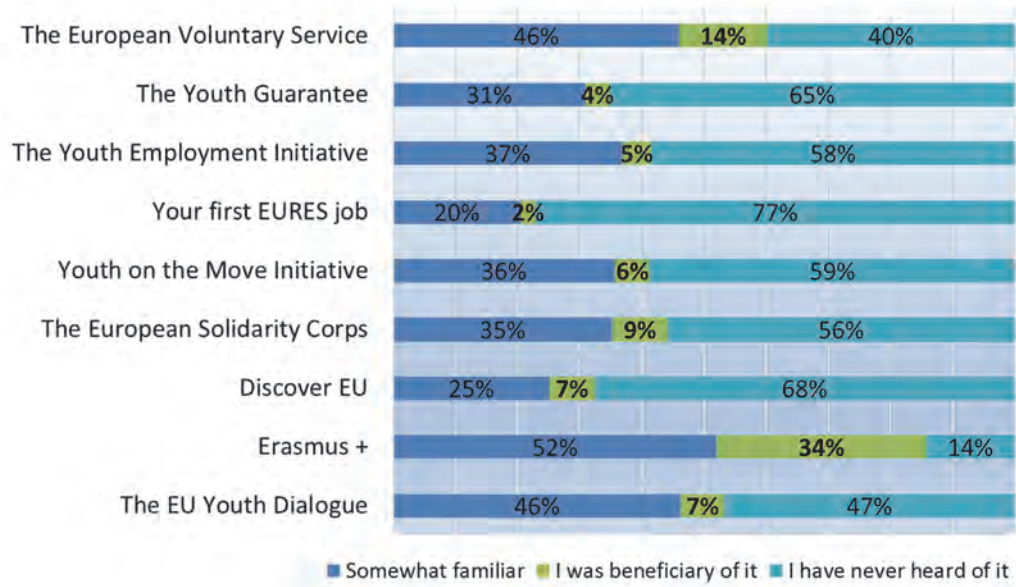
²⁶ Some of these concerns have been endorsed through the European Youth Forum’s Resolution on key issues concerning European youth, especially marginalized youth. See: European Youth Forum. (2017). Resolution on key issues concerning European youth, especially marginalised youth. Available online at: https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0196-17_Resolution_On-Key_Issues_Concerning_European_Youth.pdf

Compared to young people in general, Roma youth are affected by multiple discrimination and their rights are violated to a much higher extent, affecting their ability to access other rights. The question that arises is whether these concerns trigger sociopolitical activism among young Roma people and/or determine them to participate in public and political matters.

Roma youth are also excluded from EU level youth initiatives. Based on respondents' answers it became clear that Roma youth do not benefit from the EU programs targeting youth. As detailed in the methodology section of this report most or at least a high percentage of the survey respondents have a certain level of education and a smaller percentage of them are employed. However, they have pointed out that eligibility criteria linked to education or employment are not the main reasons why Roma youth lack access to such opportunities.

As it can be noticed in Figure 2, Erasmus+ is one of the programs that familiar to Roma youth and 34% of the respondents claim they have benefited from it. This can be associated with the respondents' profile, with around 42% of them having or pursuing a higher education degree and therefore the likelihood of benefiting from mobility grants. The second most familiar and most often accessed EU youth program is the European Voluntary Service (EVS), with 46% of the respondents stating that they are somewhat familiar with the program, whereas 14% of them stated they have benefited from it. This may partly be an outcome of the recent efforts of organizations like Phiren Amenca who have been investing in fostering Roma youth mobility and empowerment. As far as the other EU programs are concerned, around half of the respondents have not heard about such programs, or while being to a certain extent familiar with them, less Roma youth have benefited from schemes such as the Youth Guarantee, Your first EURES job.

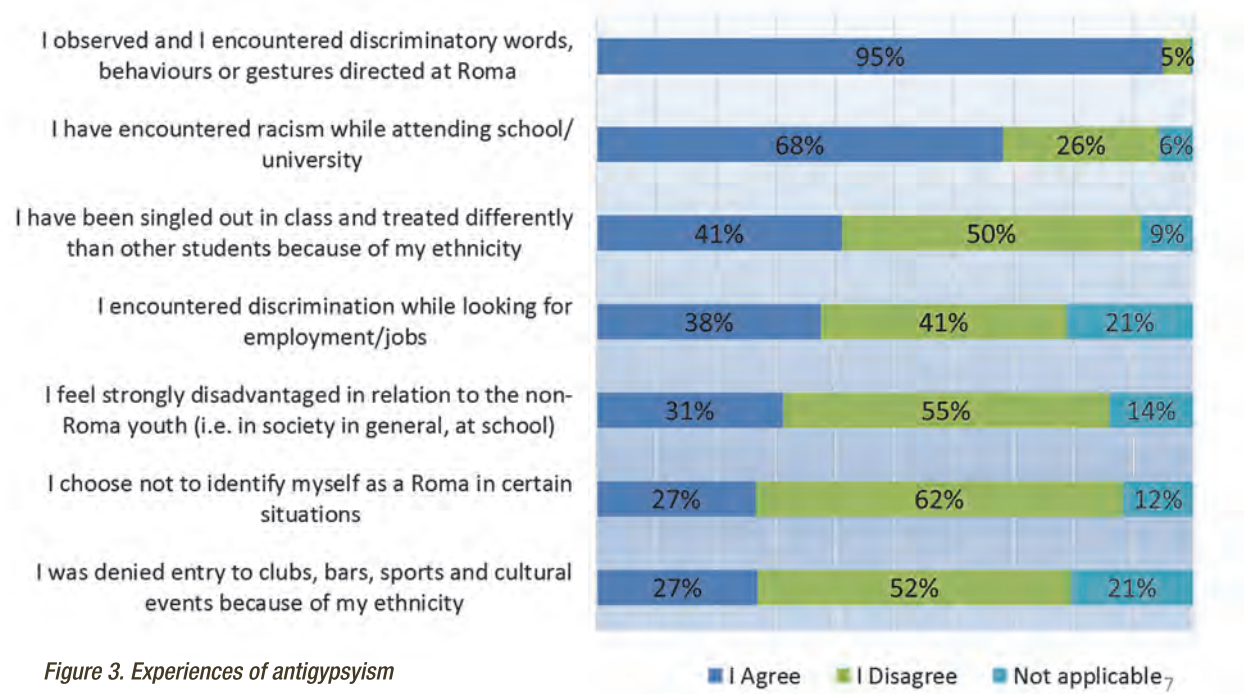
Figure 2. Roma youth and EU youth programs



With regards to the Youth Guarantee, research conducted by ERGO Network (2016) pointed out that young Roma were faced with the (indirect) risk of discrimination in accessing this program. Additional research showed that the Youth Guarantee was not reaching the young Roma to the desired extent due to overly complicated and cumbersome registration procedures that left potential beneficiaries struggling to access such services (ERGO Network, 2017).

5.1. ANTIGYSPYISM

Figure 1 above has shown that racism and discrimination is a main concern for 73% of the respondents. Similarly, about 95% of the respondents stated they have observed or encountered discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at Roma in general in their lives so far. This shows that young Roma are heavily exposed to racist attitudes and practices. When asked whether they have encountered racism while attending their study programs, 68% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 26% of them disagreed, whereas for the remaining 8% the statement was not applicable.



Roma youngsters have mixed experiences when it comes to whether they have been singled out in education settings (e.g. classrooms) and treated differently than other students because of their ethnicity; as such, around 41% of the students agree with the statement, whereas 50% of them do not (research focusing on manifestations of antigypsyism in academia shows that racism is a strong phenomenon in schools and universities).²⁸ In answer to the question whether Roma youth encountered discrimination while looking for employment or jobs, the results show that 38% of respondents did encounter such discrimination. This shows that employers' negative attitudes towards Roma youth are not changing despite Roma youth's increasing levels of education and professional experience.

Based on the responses, around 55% of the respondents do not feel disadvantaged compared to non-Roma youth (e.g., in society in general, at school) whereas 30% of them agreed that they are in an unfavorable position compared to non-Roma youth. In addition, around 30% of Roma youth stated they were denied entry to clubs, bars, sports and cultural events because of their ethnicity.

²⁸ Torotcoi, S., and Pecak, M. (2019). Path to Higher Education: Combating Antigypsyism by Building Roma Students' Aspirations and Resilience - Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe. Available at: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/20116_book_roma_final.pdf

Experiences such as the above can contribute to shaping Roma youth identity. 27% of the survey respondents claimed that they choose not to identify themselves as Roma in certain situations, whereas 62% identify themselves as Roma regardless of the situation. Existing research points out that even though Roma youth identity is shaped to a certain extent by discrimination, Roma youth “rather tend to denounce the phenomenon of self-stigmatization that stems from the victimization perspective” and “construct a narrative that builds on shared identity but exposes its elements of ethnic pride (Mirga, 2018, p. 205).²⁹

While no clear links can be drawn on the effect of antigypsyism on participation of Roma youth, Figure 5 on p. 34 points out that about 13% of our survey respondents stated that what motivates or would motivate them to be involved in Roma related activities and in promoting Roma rights is the racism Roma youth themselves or people they known have encountered.

“Most of our youth and intelligentsia do not have a sense of belonging to us or are ashamed or not interested in what is happening to our ethnic group”.

(Roma youth, Bulgaria)

²⁹ Mirga, A. 2018. “Be Young, Be Roma”: Modern Roma Youth Activism in the Current Panorama of Romani Affairs, pp. 197-215. In Beck, S. and A. Ivasiuc (eds), Roma Activism. Reimagining Power and Knowledge. New York: Berhghan Books.

5.2. ACCESS TO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SCHOOLING

Access to good quality education remains a key issue for Roma youth and children. European Commission research/data (2018) shows that more Roma children participate in early childhood education and care than in previous years (53% in 2016, up from 47% in 2011) – with the most significant improvements in Spain, Slovakia, Bulgaria Hungary and Romania - and there are fewer early school leavers in the Member States (68% in 2016, declining from 87% in 2011). The Roma Civil Monitor reports (2018) show that lack of access to kindergartens by Roma children is a serious issue; moreover, educational services and institutions are often inaccessible to marginalized Roma (i.e., services not available at all in rural settlements, lack of transportation, lack of places in urban educational facilities, poor quality of instruction, experiences of discrimination, or financial constraints).

Data from 2018 (European Commission, 2018) shows that Roma children (from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia) lag behind their non-Roma peers on all education indicators. A very small proportion of Roma students continued school after compulsory education. Half of Roma aged 15-18 years old surveyed in the EC report do not attend school (48%) and only 5% of Roma aged 18-24 across the nine surveyed Member States continued school. School segregation remains a problem in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia despite being legally prohibited by the European Court of Human Rights' recent case law and national courts (i.e., the 2020 Hungarian Kuria decision on Gyöngyöspata). In Slovakia (62%), Hungary (61%) and Bulgaria (60%), most Roma children (aged 6-15) attend schools in which all or most of their schoolmates are Roma (European Commission, 2018).

Fundamental Rights Agency research (2018) shows that among the young Roma aged 16–24 who are no longer in education, more than three quarters have completed at most only lower secondary education. This research also points out that a significant proportion of young Roma aged 16–24 are still in education – 18% of those who have completed at least upper secondary education and 19% of those who have completed at most lower secondary education. Furthermore, while on average only 3% of Roma aged 20–24 are still in education, this proportion among Roma aged 16–19 is 34%.

In sum, the data above shows that the Roma youth education situation in most EU countries is still problematic when compared to the mainstream population. Based on the longitudinal data presented it can be stated that the educational situation of Roma youth has been improving slightly over time. Yet, Roma children and youth still encounter structural barriers when accessing educational opportunities and lack support in successfully completing upper secondary education levels.

5.3. EMPLOYMENT

Employment is the third main concern for young Roma people. As mentioned before, out of the total number of respondents 34% are employed and 5% unemployed. When asked whether Roma youth encountered discrimination when looking for employment, 38% of the respondents agreed they encountered discrimination, with female respondents disproportionately more affected.

“Nowadays the youth segment is the most disadvantaged at the national level. This is because society did not change much, did not succeed to evolve enough so that it can shape and integrate youth on the labor market or within the political scene”

(24 years old, female, unemployed Romania)

A 2016 FRA survey found that only one in four Roma aged 16 years or older described their main activity as ‘employed’ or ‘self-employed’. This includes full-time and part-time work, as well as ‘occasional work’ when considered as the main activity. On average, 63% of Roma aged 16-24 were not employed, in education or training, compared with the 12% EU average on the NEET (‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’) rate for the same age group. According to the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017) only one in four Roma aged 16 years or older reports being ‘employed’ or ‘self-employed’ as their main activity. Roma women reported much lower employment rates than Roma men (16% compared to 34%), whereas 72% of young Roma women belonged to the NEET category compared to 55% of young Roma men.

Focusing on the situation of Roma youth employment, an ERGO Network research (2017) points out that one of the main obstacles stopping young people from finding work in their area is the high level of discrimination and prejudices from employers’ side or the employers’ flexibility in selecting the employee. The ERGO Network research has shown that the more educated young Roma are and the better their geographical conditions (i.e., living in big urban areas closer to employment opportunities), the higher their chances of being employed. There are big discrepancies between Roma college or university graduates who live in urban areas and Roma youth who are both marginalized (from rural and/or segregated areas) and uneducated (especially women) when it comes to their employment needs. College graduates need jobs that match their level of qualification, whereas less-educated Roma need programmes that can support them to either stay in their current school or to continue their education.

5.4. ROMA YOUTH PRESENCE IN STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS DEALING WITH ROMA PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

In terms of participation in public affairs, relatively many Roma youth are involved in decision-making structures at the European level compared to previous years; many have run for elections at different levels or are employed in public administration units. In the following part, reference is made to some of Roma young people's achievements and successes in this respect.

Roma elected to public office or serving in government bodies

In the 2016 Parliamentary elections from Romania, two Roma candidates (one of them a young person) were on the Social Democratic Party list. Florin Petre Manole was the only elected to the Chamber of Deputies where he currently holds different positions in permanent commissions, including on human rights and national minorities, or anti-discrimination.

In **France**, there is little data on minorities in general, due to the fact that collecting ethnic data is prohibited and maybe the most relevant aspect is that France does not recognize any minorities. The scarce data shows that indeed Roma and Sinti are participating in their community life, with one "Gitan" being the mayor of a relatively small rural community. Former honorary advisor to the 2014 Romanian prime minister, Roma activist, future lawyer and Sorbonne graduate, Romanian born Anina Ciuciu ran for the French Senate as part of the Notre Avenir list in 2017.³⁰ "The Senate elections are very elitist because they are indirect, in the sense regular people cannot vote just the elected ones can cast their votes (mayors, deputies etc.). The parties advise their constituencies to vote for the party candidate" says Anina. Unfortunately, the results were not as positive as expected, and Anina did not win, however she and others on her list succeeded to get a relatively high number of votes.

In 2017, in **Poland** Justyna Matkowska³¹ (26 years old) worked for the Voivode's Plenipotentiary for National and Ethnic Minorities. Justyna is known for being a famous Roma artist, and together with her sister they have founded the Siostry Matkowskie group. After completing her Philology studies, she has enrolled in a PhD programme in the same field. "We have two Romnia working in Governor's office: me And Elżbieta Mirga. I am a Plenipotentiary of Governor for National and Ethnic Minorities; she holds a similar position but in the other Governor's office. I have also tried my luck in the regional elections however unsuccessfully" she said. Justyna was selected for her position in January 2016. Her tasks within the Plenipotentiary focused mainly on her jurisdiction (Lower Silesian Voivodeship) and relate to monitoring the situation of national and ethnic minorities; maintaining the cooperation with organizations of national and ethnic minorities and other public administration institutions in the voivodeship; examining complaints to the Voivode's jurisdiction regarding the issue of national and ethnic minorities; but also the preparation of materials and reports for institutions dealing with the issues of national and ethnic minorities.

³⁰ Personal online communication with Anina Ciuciu, La Voix des Roms, 22 December 2017.

³¹ Personal online communication with Justyna Matkowska, Voivode's Plenipotentiary for National and Ethnic Minorities, 22 December 2017.

In Hungary there are specific Roma Minority Self-Governments on national and local levels which limit the participation of Roma and Roma youth in mainstream politics. In the 2019 municipal elections there were young Roma also running for elections at the municipality level and as a result, a 27-years old Roma, Lajos Balogh became member of the City Council of the 8th district in Budapest. This was particularly important because a high proportion of Roma live in that district.

Roma youth selected for employment in European level bodies

As of 2017,³² the **Council of Europe's (CoE) central body**, staff included ten Roma employees and two paid interns (supported by the Central European University). Among these ten employees, one has an indefinite permanent contract, three of them have permanent fixed term contracts (renewable as long as there are available funds), three were employed after a competition among CoE staff and are temporary staff for the duration of specific projects. Being CoE staff requires university studies and some years of experience, reason why most of the youth who work there are more than 25-26 years old.

The European Commission was among the first institutions which in 2005 started an internship designed specifically for Roma youth - the European Commission Internship for Young Roma Graduates (co-funded by the Open Society Foundations). This had an enormous contribution for Roma youngsters to get to know about EU level policy-making. Since then, until 2015 when the programme was closed, around 80 young Roma graduates took part in it.

The European Parliament has quite a long history with regards to the inclusion of youth.

Roma youth have had the opportunity to intern for the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. According to their website, the S&D Group created the Fund for young Roma in 2010, as part of their “fight against xenophobia and racism – particularly against Roma communities – [to] get young Roma people involved in policy-making at all levels and give them an insight into the work of the European institutions”.³³

The OSCE ODIHR is one of the intergovernmental organizations which has Roma youth in positions that deal with Roma youth – the Junior Experts hired under the Roma and Sinti Youth Initiative in 2014 (for writing background papers), and 2016-2017 recruitment for Junior Experts in ODIHR office for six months. In addition to ODIHR, there were and still are many Young Roma Professional positions in OSCE field operations.

Last but not least, other agencies and structures such as the Financial Mechanism Office (EEA and Norway Grants) and the Fundamental Rights Agency provide paid traineeship positions for young Roma as well.

Ensuring Roma youth presence in structures and institutions dealing directly with Roma programs and policies is paramount for opening up to people who are directly affected by such policies. While traineeships and short-term fellowships do not assure a workplace within those institutions, they create potential for future Roma professionals and leadership.

³² Personal online communication with Aurora Ailincăi the Head of the Strategic Partnerships Unit - Roma and Travelers Team, Directorate of Democratic Governance and Anti-Discrimination, Council of Europe, 22 December 2017.

³³ “The Fund for young people of Roma origin”, The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/fund-young-people-roma-origin>

5.5. MIGRATION AND MOBILITY WITHIN THE EUROPEAN SPACE

Regulating migration and intra-EU mobility has been some of the main reasons for the establishment of the EU level policy frameworks 10-15 years ago. In general, migrant and EU-mobile Roma³⁴ youth (both EU and non-EU citizens) face serious challenges both in their countries of origin and in their “host” countries. Whether as migrants or temporarily displaced people, Roma youth’ needs (i.e., education, socialization) are placed secondary when compared to the more pressing basic needs and challenges they and their families face (e.g., access to adequate housing and basic utilities). If Roma youth succeed to access education in the new countries they settle, they are further exposed to discrimination, present additional challenges in integrating in a new socio-academic context³⁵, and school is most of the times interrupted by another period of migration (i.e., back-and-forth between their home and host country), depending on the legal provisions for migration. Roma youth and children affected by mobility and migration (especially returnees and asylum seekers) are also exposed to linguistic barriers which pose additional challenges for school reintegration.

³⁴ For a discussion on the specific terminology see:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/post2020_eu_roma_in_diversity.pdf

³⁵ See more at: <https://romigsc.eu/about/>

5.6. GENDER RELATED ISSUES

While it is generally recognized that young Roma women and girls face different expectations and more difficulties than men and boys (i.e., fewer years of schooling, limited mobility, household work and elderly/childcare), young men and boys face challenges that should also be looked into, such as pressure into marriage, establishing their family.³⁶ Similarly, LGBTQIA+ Roma youth represents higher risks of multiple discrimination.³⁷ They are often discriminated by the majority population, including LGBTQIA+ communities, based on them being Roma; and at the same time, they can be excluded from their own families and communities because their sexualities and gender expressions/identities.

For Roma women and girls, the situation is more complex compared to their male peers. The intersectional discrimination (where 'gender', 'ethnicity' and 'age' are the categories playing the biggest role) Roma women and girls face in their communities or schools, is one of the factors most often mentioned when it comes to school dropout. Most of the times, young Roma girls are held back from attending school and pressured to get married, take care of the household, of the elders or the younger siblings. In some traditional communities it is considered improper for women to study or work outside their home areas, or even in a different city. Besides these cultural challenges, a small, however increasing number of Roma women, compared to men, are advancing in higher education.³⁸ Considering the personal, social and cultural resources Roma girls and women access through education, for most of them education can represent an increase in status (i.e., upward mobility).

One of the often-unaddressed challenges is how to involve Roma women, children and youth in Roma related debates. Roma women and girls should be considered equally important members of Roma civil society groups and beneficiaries of Roma targeted programs and projects.

³⁶ Phiren Amenca. (2019). Discussion on the future of EU Roma youth policies. Available at: <https://phirenamenca.eu/discussion-on-the-future-of-eu-roma-youth-policies/>

³⁷ Council of Europe. Multiple discrimination and gender equality. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/multiple-discrimination-and-gender-equality>

³⁸ Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Emily Danvers & Tanja Jovanovic (2017): Roma women's higher education participation: whose responsibility? Gender and Education, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2016.1274386

5.7. LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES AND SPORT

There is a general perception that there is a strong interest in leisure time activities and sports amongst young adults. Generally speaking, sports on a professional level require significant financial resources (e.g., for nutrition, training, equipment, etc.) which indirectly push away Roma youth from pursuing such careers. In 2018, the case of a young Roma girl, Annamárie Horváthová, who ran the “Run for Health” race in flat shoes and won, showed once again that “children from impoverished conditions do not have much chance to develop their talent”.³⁹

Besides this, sport is not free of discrimination, antigypsyism and attitudes. In recent years in Romania, football competitions have been marked by racist incidents. UEFA has fined Steaua Bucharest Football Club for racist incidents in the past, but national competitions are under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Professional League (RPL). The RPL has been led by a former MP of the extremist party, who always dismissed racism against Roma as an innocent display of rivalry among football clubs. Such incidents are some examples of the increasing racism in sports in Romania.

Roma activists and other human rights supporters have been taking further steps to diminish this phenomenon in sports and, in the same time, to keep youngsters away from high risk behavior like crime, drugs and/or prostitution by sport and developed specific activities for young Roma:

- In Romania, starting with 2010 Valeriu Nicolae and his team implemented projects focused on awareness and on promoting antidiscrimination through sports and their efforts have been recognized internationally.
- Since 2013, in Czech Republic Lukas and Karolina Danek established the Ride for Happiness project which aims “to discover and nurture new talents in sport, art, and music while promoting positive role models”. Among other things it aims to break down negative stereotypes while fighting racism and discrimination of the Roma community.⁴⁰
- In England, Ladislav Žiga established a boxing team for Slovak and Czech migrant children of Roma origin.⁴¹
- In the UK, the Roma Support Group put together a sport inclusion project for Roma youth as a way to explore opportunities and develop new skills while combating social exclusion and marginalization.⁴²

Roma youth is one of the often-neglected Roma subgroups which has not been sufficiently addressed with regards to different social policy areas such as the value of sport, and drug abuse (Roma Civil Monitor, 2020).⁴³

³⁹ See more at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-girl-from-impoverished-romani-family-wins-race-running-in-flats>

⁴⁰ Interview with Lukas Danek available at: <https://news.expats.cz/sports-fitness/the-ride-for-happiness-project/>

⁴¹ See more at: <https://bit.ly/382W00e>

⁴² See more at: <https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/sport-inclusion.html>

⁴³ Roma Civil Monitor. (2020). A synthesis of civil society's reports on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies in the European Union Identifying blind spots in Roma inclusion policy.

Available online at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-analysis-and-synthesis>

5.8. DRUG USE AND OTHER ADDICTIONS

Most of the research and policy making on intersectional and multiple discrimination affecting Roma focuses on gender and its correlation with other grounds of inequality (age, ethnicity, and class). Other grounds, like age, urban/rural residence, or substance abuse, trafficking, are largely neglected. Populations that are impoverished, marginalized, and lack appropriate health and social services are disproportionately highly affected by drug use, addictions, HIV, etc.⁴⁴ We can surmise that public health problems are pervasive within Roma communities as they lack level of health care and prevention services available to the majority populations in their countries of residence.

Research on the topic is scarce, although some has been undertaken in Spain⁴⁵. This points to high incidences of drug consumption and mental health problems among the Roma population in that country and indicates that these two problems are connected to social determinants of health, such as living conditions, employment, education and housing, among others.

However, drug use and other addictions were among the least frequent concerns for our survey respondents (See Figure 1). This might be due to the fact that in most (traditional) communities the drug issue is a taboo topic. Though different NGOs provide services to drug users in order to help them overcome their addictions (e.g., Carusel in Bucharest, Romania⁴⁶), NGOs are not able to deal with the issue in-depth. This might be due to the sensitivity of the issues among certain communities, the low capacity of NGOs but also different actors' lack of knowledge on the topic.

⁴⁴ Marcu, O. (e.d.). (2012). Understanding drug addiction in Roma communities. SRAP Network. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/4862043/Understanding_Drug_Addiction_in_Roma_and_Sinti_Communities_Research_report

⁴⁵ López, J. A., García, R. F., & Martí, T. S. (2018). Drugs and Mental Health Problems among the Roma: Protective Factors Promoted by the Iglesia Evangélica Filadelfia. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(2), 335. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15020335>

⁴⁶ See more at: <https://carusel.org/>

6. CHALLENGES, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION

After exploring what the main concerns for Roma youth are, this section aims to provide an overview on the different forms and mechanisms for participation, and the main obstacles Roma youth face when engaging with civic and public issues.

6.1. WHO DO ROMA YOUTH TURN TO FOR SUPPORT?

Survey respondents were asked to reflect on **who can help or support Roma youth to address their concerns and needs**. The three most frequent categories of (social) actors and structures that offer support are family, friends and the nearby NGO. Realities from the ground among Phiren Amenca members and partners show that the few existing Roma youth NGOs are struggling to survive. If Roma youth empowerment, participation and personal development is to be achieved, there is a need to support Roma youth NGOs, and Roma and pro-Roma organizations have to be more open for Roma youth and mainstream youth structures. Similarly, new Roma youth structures and informal groups should be supported to become more formalized and active.

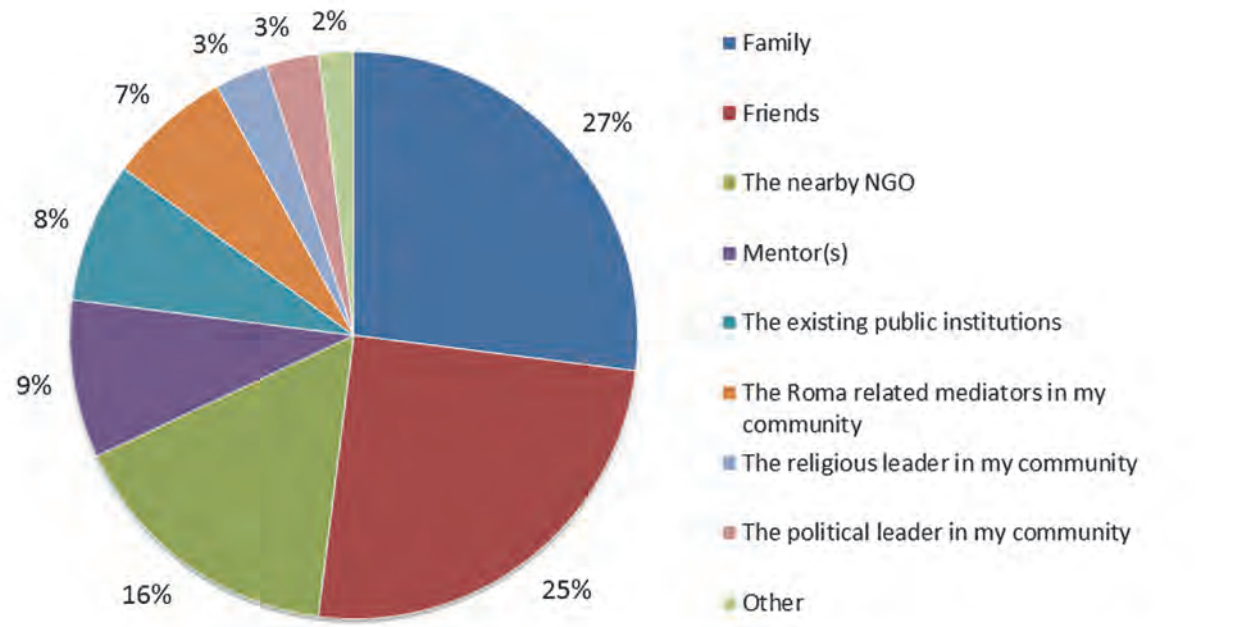


Figure 4. Who can help you/ support you address your concerns and needs?

As the figure above shows, most support by far is provided by informal support structures such as family and friends. NGOs, mentors and mediators are the next most important category. Much less prominent categories are public institutions, religious leaders and political leaders.

Roma mentors and mediators are important support mechanisms components for Roma youth, as the results of our survey also shows, since most of Roma youth get in contact with them through early schooling and education, but also through youth related work. According to Roma Youth, Building Bridges! Report (2015)⁴⁷ Roma mediators are supposed to be experts on equal opportunities, acting as bridges between Roma communities and institutions, facilitating the availability of different services or information.

In our survey, Roma youth exhibited relatively low trust in public institutions as structures they would turn to in addressing their concerns; and even lower trust and confidence in the religious and political leaders of their communities.

About 40% of the respondents stated that they are members of an NGO and 57% of the total respondents could list Roma (youth) NGOs they are aware of. Across Europe, the top 10 organizations our respondents mentioned most frequently are the following (ordered based on the number of references):

- 1 Phiren Amenca (19)
- 2 Roma Education Fund (16)
- 3 Areté Youth Foundation (12)
- 4 Romaversitas (11, across Europe)
- 5 UCCU Roma Informal Educational Foundation (8)
- 6 FAGiC Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (7)
- 7 Nevo Parudimos Association (7)
- 8 Partida Romilor – youth branches (7)
- 9 Agentia Impreuna (5) and Uniunea Civica a Tinerilor Romi (5)
- 10 FSG Fundación Secretariado Gitano (5)

Despite the importance of NGOs in providing support for Roma youth, they were criticized by some of the respondents as being too donor driven, instead of tackling issues relevant for Roma youth.

“In my country, I think that Roma youth are not particularly concerned about Roma society and problems. I think this is due to the Roma NGOs in Bulgaria. They have turned every single problem of Roma society into projects and piles of paper. To date, the majority of intelligent young Roma are excluded from such organizations because some of these organizations are approaching sectarianism rather than a wide-open community. When a young, educated Roma is disappointed with his or her own community, he/she automatically ceases to be interested in any civic or political involvement at a regional or national level. My main point is that the work structures of most NGOs need to be changed in order to be able to attract “those” young Roma who would be really helpful to their community.”

(Roma youth, Bulgaria)

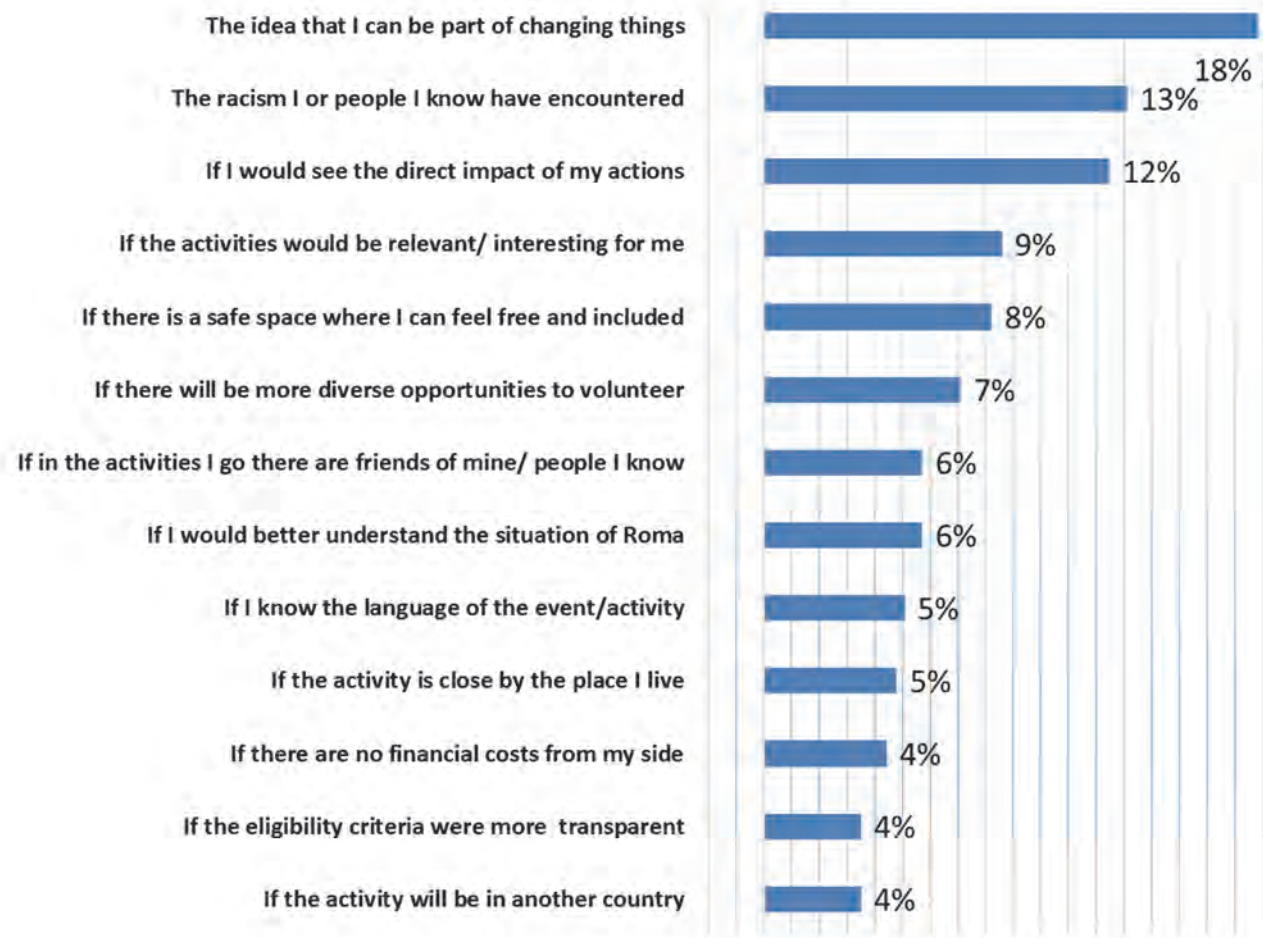
“Sometimes youth activities are more about what the [donor] institutions want than what the young people want. It is like you get impulse to be active or more engaged but after no support to follow up to participate”.

(33 years old, male Czech Republic)

6.2. WHAT MOTIVATES ROMA YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC LIFE?

Roma youth get involved in Roma related activities and in promoting of Roma rights for many different reasons, including acquiring skills, finding comfort and companionship, or accessing resources.

Figure 5. Motivation for civic and political engagement and participation



Additionally, respondents identified a generational clash within the Roma movement when answering this question. They reported that within the broader Roma movement, there are frictions and debates. One of them is the ideological rift between the older, conservative generation and the younger, more liberal, radical generation of Roma youth activists. As a result, Roma youth see participation in specific youth-focused activities as a way of making their own voice heard.

“I reckon Roma youth would be more open to start their own initiatives if the older generation wouldn’t use their power to silence young people”
(28 years old, employed-student, female, Finland)

Another motivation for participation relates to Roma youth's self-perception of their power and capacity. The most frequent answer among the respondents pointed towards their trust that they can be part of changing things (see Figure below). The second most frequent answer driving participation and activism is the direct fight against the racism Roma youth or people they know have encountered.

"Roma youth are not motivated enough with regards to civic participation. I believe this is because there is a lack of information about Romani history and culture. We have to know our history! Since I have found out about important historical events from the slavery period in Romania to contemporary issues, I am much more motivated to get involved"

(20 years old, student,
female, Romania)

"I believe Roma youth is disappointed by everything going on at the national level both in terms of mainstream politics but also about the Romani movement. We all (the Romani youth) want to be the change!"

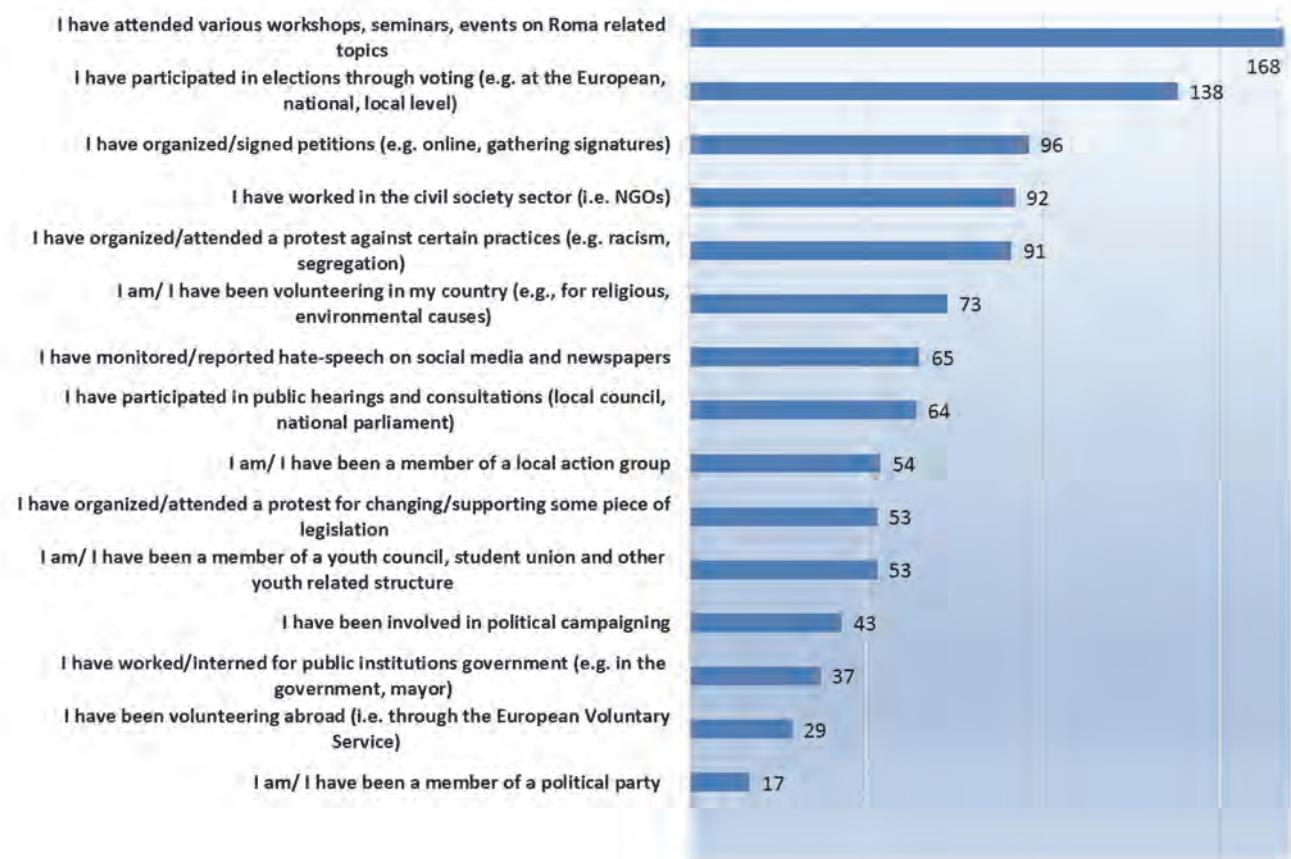
(34 years old, volunteering,
female, Romania)

Based on their responses, what would allow Roma youth to get more engaged would be to see the direct impact of their actions; to be offered relevant and diverse opportunities to volunteer; and quite importantly, whether there is a safe space where Roma youth can feel free and included (i.e., language, closeness to home, being with friends, no financial costs, transparent information, international travel).

6.3. FORMS OF ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Based on the Roma youth survey, it became clear that Roma youth are active citizens who are highly involved in the civic and political lives of their communities. In order to measure the extent to which young people are participating in different civic activities, but also to explore whether they are included or excluded from decision-making processes, youth, mainstream and Roma-related structures, respondents were asked to select activities they participated in from a list. The Figure below provides a summary of the results.

Figure 6. How is the participation of Roma youth manifested?



The most frequent activities that Roma youth participate in are various workshops, seminars or events on Roma-related topics. This comes as no surprise since there are different types of funds and projects that envision and organize such events, designed specifically for Roma youth. Organizers of such events include academic institutions, international and national NGOs, but also organizations active in local communities. As Mirga (2018) argues, the “growing attention towards young Roma and increasing funding for youth-targeted initiatives facilitated the emergence of spaces for young Roma from across Europe to meet, exchange experiences and brainstorm together”.⁴⁸ Roma youth have emerged as a specific target group - recipients of multiple trainings, internships and workshops - that many believe should be mobilized to join civic and political action.

⁴⁸ See more at Roma Youth Activism ‘We are the present!’, available online at: <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/roma-youth-activism-we-are-present/>

Recently, studies have shown that those Roma youngsters who participate in different programmes and projects, (especially education related) which target Roma youth, generally come from better-off environments within the Roma community. However, when compared to the mainstream population they come from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.⁴⁹ Marginalized Roma youth should be present and active in different structures at the local and national level in order to prevent their perpetual marginalization and exclusion.

The results of the survey also indicate that the second most frequent activity Roma youth participate in is voting (e.g., at the European, national, local level). However, up until now, there is no data on Roma voter turnout. Similar to our findings, research conducted by the National Democratic Institute shows that, for example in Visegrad 4 countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia and Poland), the most frequent form of political participation for youth aged 16-29 is voting.⁵⁰

Data across Europe shows that there is a relatively low turnout of young people in elections.⁵¹ One of the possible explanations for low youth turnout can be the fact that “their demands are not being addressed by the political parties or political leaders competing in elections”.⁵² Indeed, the literature on voter turnout identified factors such as age (people above 26 years old are more likely to vote), education (higher levels of education are associated with higher rates of voter turnout), political interest (e.g. gained through citizenship education in schools) and awareness of civic duty as most common factors encouraging voter participation.⁵³ As far as the situation of Roma youth is concerned, it is expected that turnout will increase considering the (slow) growth in the educational levels of Roma youth, and the associated factors that come along through education and civic activism. Generally speaking, it is believed that they “have the highest voter turnouts during local elections because they see local authorities as important to their everyday lives”.⁵⁴

“Neither Roma nor Roma youth are allowed to hold high positions that could have a positive impact on the overall life of Roma in Bulgaria. Roma were only sought during election campaigns to buy their votes and to continue living in the same misery and poverty. The Roma are not wanted in the BG rotten society. And political leaders have no desire to integrate those through whose poverty they have become obscenely rich ... And ungodly”.

(Roma youth, Bulgaria)

⁴⁹ See Stela Garaz, “Helping the marginalised or supporting the elite? Affirmative action as a tool for increasing access to higher education for ethnic Roma”, *European Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 295–311.

⁵⁰ National Democratic Institute. (2020). Youth Attitudes on Politics and Democracy in Central Europe. Available at: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_Youth2020_FINAL_0.pdf

⁵¹ See the National Democratic Institute research for Hungary: <https://www.ndi.org/publications/youth-attitudes-politics-and-democracy-hungary>

⁵² Voter Turnout Trends around the World, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2016, pp. 39-40, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voter-turnout-trends-around-the-world.pdf>

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Roma and Sinti Political Participation: Opportunities and Risks of Local-level Engagement, OSCE/ODHIR, 2016, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/219511?download=true>

Most of the Roma youth have issues with making free and informed choices with regards to voting preferences.⁵⁵ Literature shows that a small percentage of Roma youth (likely to be higher educated) have a clear stand with regards to their political and party preferences, as opposed to those who did not have the opportunity to get familiar with how certain party programmes or ideologies might affect their interests.⁵⁶ Roma from rural areas are most of the times subject to vote-buying⁵⁷ and they are also more likely to vote for the party with a strong electoral campaign, regardless of the proposed changes or policies. Moreover, it is widely known that the socio-economic “vulnerabilities of Roma and Sinti communities are often exploited during election processes through vote buying and vote manipulation, direct pressure or threats”.⁵⁸

The next three most frequent forms of participation mentioned by our respondents are **organizing and signing petitions** (96 respondents); **organizing and attending protests against certain practices** (e.g., racism, segregation) or for changing/supporting some specific pieces of legislation (91 respondents); followed by **working for civil society** (92 respondents, whereas about 40% of the total respondents stated they are members of an NGO).

“Roma youth are quite disorganized as a movement, and it is rather difficult to work with such a group. They are in for protests not for real changes, which most of the times start with themselves”.

(23 years old, female, Romania)

Based on the survey responses, it was revealed that a rather high number of respondents (73 respondents) are or have been **volunteering** in their countries (i.e., for religious, or environmental causes), yet only 13% of them have been volunteering abroad (i.e. through the European Voluntary Service).⁵⁹ In the experience of Roma youth organizations such as Phiren Amenca’ local volunteering as well as international long-term voluntary service can raise the self-esteem of young people and be the starting point for having a life perspective, and on the other hand it has various beneficial effects on society. This is especially crucial for young Roma in Europe, whose realities and representation are often characterized by the effects of antigypsyism. Therefore, is important to create equal opportunities for all young people, especially through equal access to voluntary engagement and voluntary service as a tool for the transition of young Roma to autonomy and the world of work.

⁵⁵ Roma and Sinti Political Participation: Opportunities and Risks of Local-level Engagement OSCE/ODHIR, 2016, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/219511?download=true>

⁵⁶ Tudorel Taba, “The Political Participation of Roma Youth: What Is It and Why Do We Need It?” in „Activism, Participation and Security Among Roma and Sinti Youth.” OSCE/ODIHR Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security Report. 2015, pp. 96–102, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/187861?download=true>>.

⁵⁷ The Price of a Vote in a Bulgarian Pub, transparency.org, 9 June 2015, Politics and Government, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/the_price_of_a_vote_in_a_bulgarian_pub.

⁵⁸ „Full participation of Roma and Sinti in electoral processes essential to their successful inclusion, say participants at OSCE/ODIHR meeting in Warsaw” osce.org, 28 October 2016, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/277806>>.

⁵⁹ Phiren Amenca puts efforts to promote the European Voluntary Service among young Roma: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/phiren-amenca/open-call-voluntary-service-for-young-roma-and-non-roma-in-europe/2267025653386524/>

As the results of the survey shows, Roma youth are also involved in monitoring and reporting **hate-speech** on social media and newspapers. Generally speaking, online activism is quite widespread, with the online media working as a tool supporting Roma youth mobilization. More and more Roma young people share posts with political content on social media or write a political comment on a portal or online media outlet or participate in online campaigning. Hate content in social media is ever increasing and many young Roma are exposed to such experiences. Previous research conducted by Phiren Amenca “Volunteering - Citizens' Tools for Roma Participation”⁶⁰ points out that Roma are among the primary targets of hate speech. Indifference to hate speech is unfortunately not only common among dominant groups but also among the target groups. The No Hate Speech Movement⁶¹ has been an important driver for Roma youth to get involved in dealing with and countering hate speech in a more systematic manner. More recently, NGOs have been putting efforts in providing training to enhance the digital skills of Roma young people (i.e., A better NETwork for Sinti and Roma! Training course on digital technologies run by Phiren Amenca⁶²).

As Figure 6 shows, a significant number of respondents (62 out of the 290) claimed that they had participated in **public hearings and consultations** (i.e., local council, national parliament). However, leading networks of the current research project have emphasized that young Roma people are excluded from these institutional conversations. Put simply, most young people regardless of their ethnic, sexual, religious, etc. background are robbed of their right to contribute to the process of creating, monitoring and evaluating public policies at all levels in spite of being formally invited to these. In this respect, it is safe to say that authorities (both at the central and local level) need to invest greater efforts in establishing decision-making processes that are more open and participatory, especially when a low numbers of survey respondents mentioned being part of a local action group (LAGs)⁶³ (54 respondents) and even fewer worked or interned for different public institutions (37 respondents).

Out of the total number of respondents, only 53 stated that they were members of youth councils, student unions and other **youth related structures**. This shows once again that Roma youth are excluded from such bodies and do not have access to networks and structures of representation. A 2020 study of the CoE (forthcoming⁶⁴) directed at the national youth councils and international youth organizations showed that only 3 of them responded to CoE's survey and all of them had Roma members or representatives. CoE's research pointed out that national youth councils “strive to empower youth and represent youth organizations in their respective countries in national and international decision-making processes”.

⁶⁰ For more information see: <https://phirenamenca.eu/volunteering-citizens-tools-for-roma-participation/>

⁶¹ The No Hate Speech Campaign of the Council of Europe is a campaign aiming to reduce the acceptance of hate speech and to develop social awareness and participation. Besides the various campaigns, the Campaign also deals with online hate speech reports. For more information, please visit their website: <http://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/>

⁶² See more here: <https://phirenamenca.eu/a-better-network-for-sinti-and-roma-training-course-on-digital-technologies/>

⁶³ Local Action Groups (LAGs) are groups with territorial boundaries, established for implementing local development strategies by awarding grants to local projects.

⁶⁴ Roma Youth Participation and Inclusion in Standards, Policies, and Programmes in Europe

Similarly, the report pointed out that Roma youth participation and representation is often minimal or non-existent in such structures since they lack proactive measures and intentional goals to include Roma substantively. On a positive side, in December 2020 Phiren Amenca became a member of the European Youth Forum. This was an unprecedented momentum since until that moment no Roma organization achieved this status.⁶⁵

Survey respondents stated that they have been less involved in **political campaigning** – (15%), and a much lower percentage stated they are **members of a political party** (6%). These results show that respondents have a dim view of political parties, they are skeptical about their efficacy and have doubts whether political parties are capable of representing Roma youth views and interests. This can be a clear signal to Roma political parties (and not only) that Roma youth are abandoning traditional political structures as these structures tend to undervalue issues that are important to Roma youth.

At the same time, the low involvement of Roma youth in formal politics has been triggered by the lack of trust in the more senior generation of Roma “community leaders”.⁶⁶ On the other hand, compared to previous generations of Roma political leaders Roma youth are attaining (even though is still a small percentage) higher levels of education and therefore have a deeper understanding of the relevance and importance of participation and formal representation (i.e., participation in consultations, public hearings).

⁶⁵ For more info see: <https://bit.ly/3rhRePe>

⁶⁶ Chuck Sudetic, “Roma in Political Life: Macedonia—Pride and Prejudice”, [opensocietyfoundations.org](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/roma-political-life-macedonia-pride-and-prejudice), 10 September 2013, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/roma-political-life-macedonia-pride-and-prejudice>

6.4. WHAT OBSTRUCTS ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

When asked to evaluate their experiences of participation, most of our respondents presented a positive picture.

Figure 7. Self-evaluation of participation

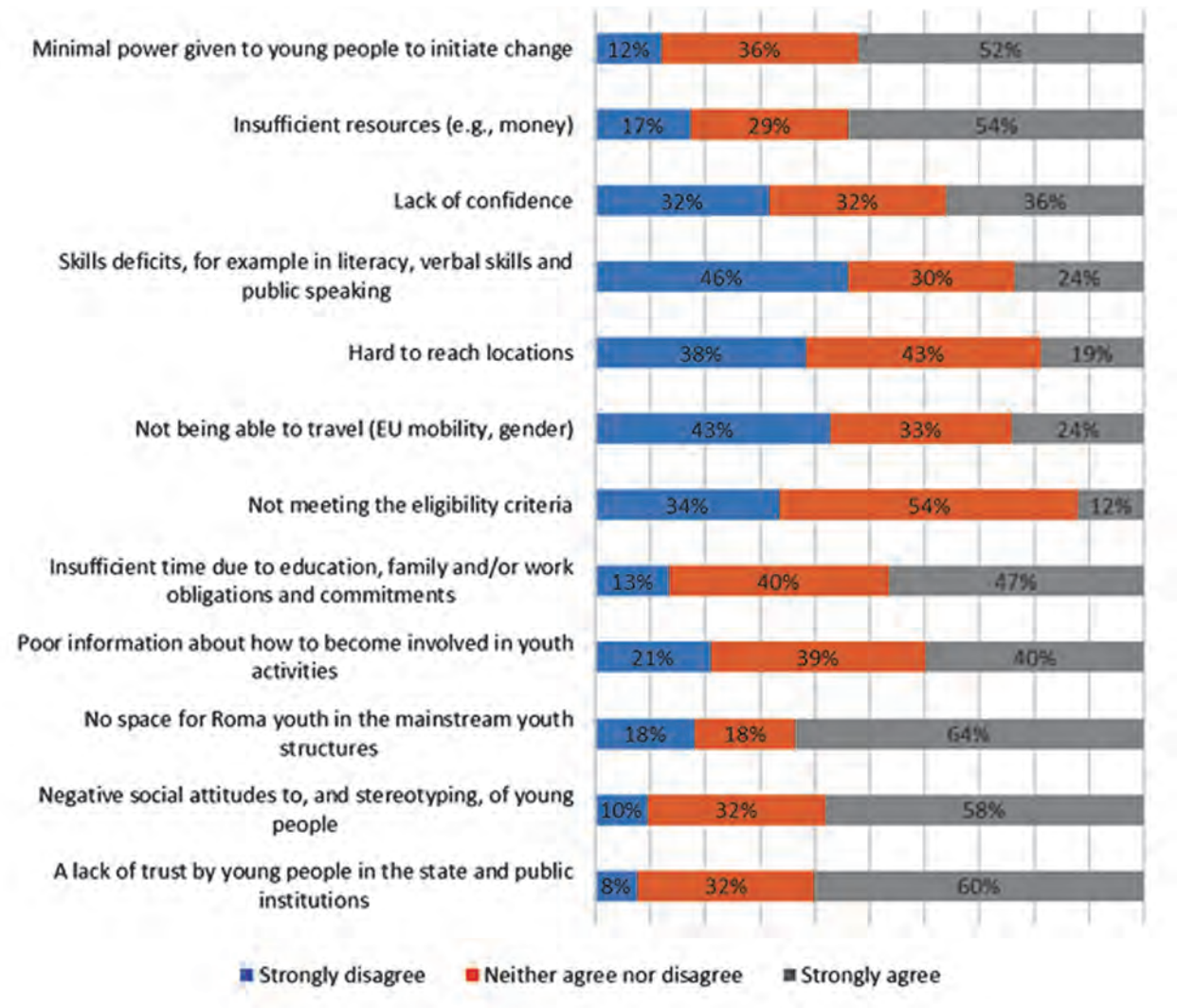


Around 80% said that they continued to receive information and news from the organizers of the Roma related events they have attended. Approximately 80% of the respondents agreed that most of their experiences in participating in Roma related activities have been good, and they felt empowered after attending Roma youth events. Around 83% of the respondents stated that they kept contact with some of the participants of the event/activity they took part in, whereas 79% kept in contact with the organizers, showing that Roma youth are likely to establish ties with each other through such events. Moreover, through trainings, seminars and workshops, (Roma youth) organizations inform Roma youth about their rights (through the lens of human rights) and strategies to pursue and defend them, but also about future events and activities.

When asked what are the main sources of information-sharing (news, opportunities, and future events) and communication among Roma youth, it was revealed that the most frequent channels are Facebook, followed by word of mouth (ex., talking with friends), Instagram and different in-person activities Roma youth have been involved in. NGOs and e-mails are the least frequent sources of information sharing and communication among Roma youth.

In order to get a glimpse of the main factors that obstruct Roma youth participation, the questionnaire asked the respondents to “Strongly agree” “Strongly disagree” and “Neither agree nor disagree” with a set of factors affecting their participation.

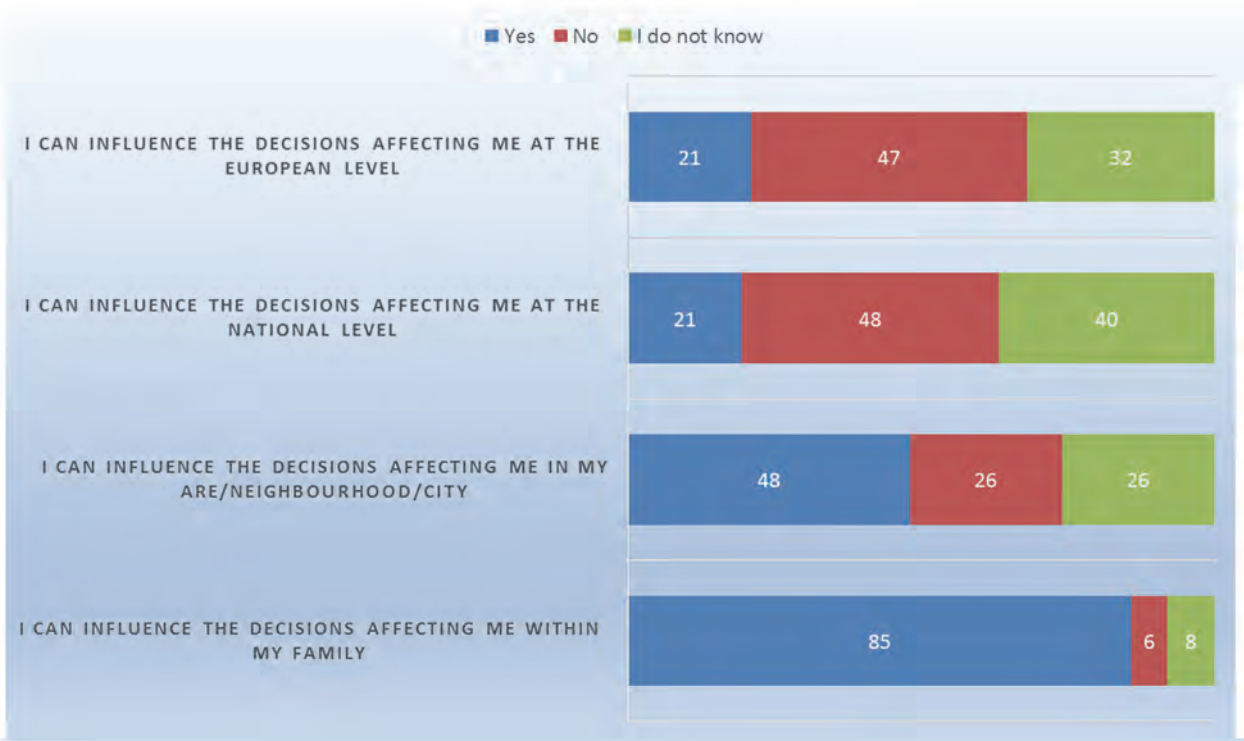
Figure 8. What obstructs Roma youth participation?



The five main barriers mentioned by Roma youth when it comes to their participation in public and political life refer to (1) the lack of space for Roma youth in mainstream youth structures – with 64% of the respondents strongly agreeing with the statement; (2) the lack of trust by young people in state and public institutions - 60% strongly agree; (3) negative social attitudes towards young people in general – 58% strongly agree; (4) insufficient resources – 54% strongly agree; and (5) the minimal power given to young people to initiate change – 52% strongly agree. The next set of obstacles in order referred to insufficient time due to education and /or work obligations and family/friends’ commitments – 47% strongly agree, and the issue of poor information on how to become involved in youth activities was another obstacle – 40% strongly agree.

The survey explored to what extent Roma youth feel they can personally impact decisions affecting them.

Figure 9. Roma youth perception of their influencing power



As is evident from the results, around 85% of the respondents believe they can influence the decisions affecting them within their family, followed by around 48% who believe they can influence the decisions affecting them in their area, neighborhood or city, whereas a low percentage, 21% each, said that they felt they could influence European and national level decisions. These findings show that Roma youth feel distanced from national and European level decisions affecting them. This does not come as a great surprise bearing in mind that young people in general are rather disappointed with how authorities operate and how much they care about their needs and problems.⁶⁷

“Roma young people need to believe in themselves and get involved in the process of a better and standard way of life - that is the right of everyone. Roma organizations, and NGOs in general, need to get out of the pink bubble they are in and reach out to young people from the outskirts and neighborhoods in small villages and towns. Government institutions have to do their jobs and respond to the NGOs, because NGOs have a direct view on reality”.

(Roma youth, Bulgaria)

⁶⁷ See also the National Democratic Institute. (2020). Youth Attitudes on Politics and Democracy in Central Europe. Available at: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_Youth2020_FINAL_0.pdf

When asked *Who should be doing what to help youth get publicly engaged?* almost all respondents agreed that different actors should do their job (see Figure 10). In answer to two different questions, 23% each of respondents said that they expected (Roma) civil society organizations and their national governments to support young Roma to participate and be more considerate towards youth. Around 19% of the respondents thought that individual Roma could take small steps to support other Roma, suggesting that Roma youth are aware of their agency and recognize the power of Roma youth activism. Last but not least, a relatively equal number of respondents, around 16-17%, indicated that Roma youth should organize themselves in a more strategic manner; and that the European community in general (e.g., EC, EP, OSCE, CoE) should do more to support Roma youth to get more engaged in public life.

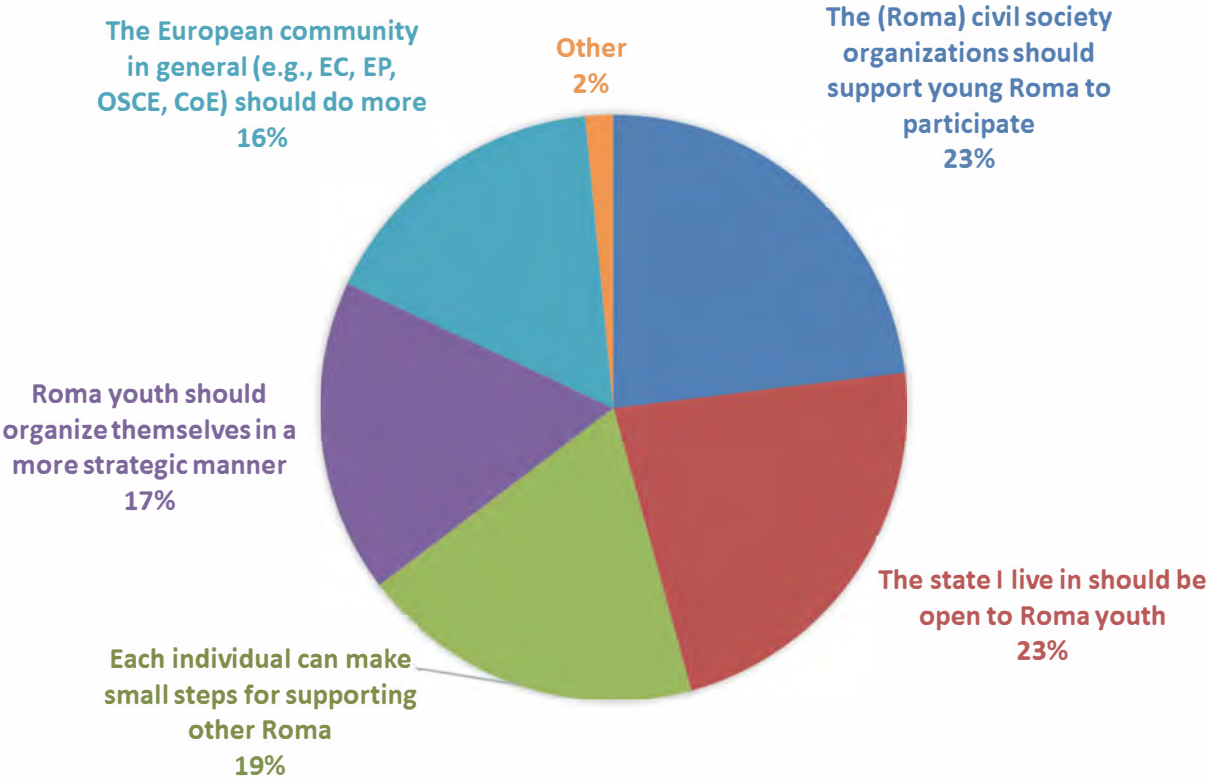


Figure 10. Who should be doing what to help youth get publicly engaged?

7. CONCLUSIONS

This report has provided an updated perspective on the situation on Roma youth with regards to their main needs, challenges, and opportunities for participation in civic and political life. Based on its main findings, we conclude the following.

First, this report has shown that Roma youth as a target group has not been systematically considered in international, European, and national strategies and frameworks. So far, EU policy documents have been referring to Roma children, and list education as their primary concern; however little if anything has been put forward on Roma youth specifically. Considering the diversity of Roma youth, there is a need to ensure that the target beneficiaries of different policies, programs, projects, and measures correspond to the needs different Roma youth groups have by age bracket. In sum, we think that **Roma youth must be a strategic priority** on international, European, national, and local level. Specific objectives, action plans and measures must be defined, developed, implemented, and monitored for them.

Secondly, Roma youth participation is a very important pillar of both youth and Roma policy. If young Roma people are involved in decisions affecting them, then they will feel a sense of ownership regarding these decisions, and the services created for them can correspond better to their aspirations, needs and rights. The limited Roma politics and mainstream youth policies in general, have failed to address the voice, presences, needs and concerns of Roma youth. Roma youth are excluded from transnational and national youth structures (e.g., from National Youth Councils) and are not adequately represented and involved in Roma structures and civil society organizations.

It is time for Roma youth to have the opportunity to be part of policy-making processes where they can question, challenge, propose and decide on the policies affecting them. There is a need to create opportunities for Roma youth to take a proactive role in taking policy decisions concerning their needs. Roma youth need to be included in different participation processes at the national and European level and in Roma related and youth related issues through public consultations, as direct citizens, as civil society representatives, as experts or interest groups but also through parliamentary hearings or political negotiations, and many other ways.

Furthermore, Roma youth should be included in both mainstream youth and Roma structures and civil society organizations not only as beneficiaries but also as full members with decision-making power so that they can ensure the sustainability of the work Roma civil societies have done so far, strengthening therefore the voice of Roma, and contributing to the diversification of Europe's youth. In sum, **Roma youth participation in structures of representation (i.e., public administration, councils, etc.) and decision-making processes** must be strengthened and guaranteed by all relevant stakeholders at all levels.

Thirdly, there is a need to address the existing structural barriers at the national and EU level that inhibit Roma youth civic and political participation. Some of these barriers include the existing political representation systems, voter fraud, other state level measures that inhibit general participation in electoral processes, the distrust Roma youth have towards the institutions serving non-Roma interests.

There is a need to invest in Roma youth capacity-building so that they can participate in political life, including specific actions that will increase the opportunities for youth participation from remote communities, and rural areas. In order to allow Roma youth to enjoy the same rights and privileges as most of the non-Roma citizens do, there is a need for more work on strengthening the capacities of young Roma, especially those who are disadvantaged ones. A particular group who could benefit from such outreach are Roma youth who have limited knowledge about Romani mobilization and activism. In sum, different actors and stakeholders **must secure capacity-building opportunities for Roma youth** through information for opportunities and awareness raising, learning and training, employment/traineeship and funding.

Finally, yet importantly, it is widely known that across Europe, most Roma youth do not enjoy the same rights and benefits as any other EU youth citizens (see EU-MIDIS II, FRA, 2018). This is because of their limited access to goods and services as a direct effect of the antigypsyism they encounter, and their age; as well as the perception of others that young people are passive beneficiaries and not active agents who can decide upon the policies affecting them. Antigypsyism has a long-term impact in diminishing Roma youth confidence, and in setting higher aspirations by Roma youth for themselves, but it can also determine the self-exclusion of Roma youth from society.⁶⁸ Antigypsyism, as a main obstacle for equal societies and Roma inclusion must be recognized and combatted; effective measures to combat antigypsyism and institutional racism have to be designed; and tolerance has to be taught/promoted. Political participation (formal, informal) can tackle antigypsyism. For example, Roma youth will gain experience and strengthen their capacity to deal themselves with Roma issues by becoming political actors, decision-makers and activists who can articulate their interests (their interests as Roma and as youth) on the political agenda of their respective communities. In sum, different state and non-state institutions involved in Roma and youth issues should work together to **empower Roma youth to be at the forefront in fighting antigypsyism**.

⁶⁸ Torotcoi, S., and Pecak, M. (2019). Path to Higher Education: Combating Antigypsyism by Building Roma Students' Aspirations and Resilience - Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe. Available at: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/20116_book_roma_final.pdf

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report seeks to make a contribution to addressing the main challenges Roma youth face in exercising their rights and voicing their concerns, the section below elaborates specific recommendations for each of these categories. Additionally, the following recommendations should be accompanied with an understanding of the diversity and intersectionality of Roma youth considering their gender, age, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, moral or political views, socioeconomic class, occupation, appearance, mental capacity or any other characteristic. Multiple discrimination and intersectional experiences must be taken into account at all levels.

Based on the above conclusions and reflections from the survey respondents, the following recommendations can be made. The recommendations are structured according to the main four gaps addressed in the conclusion section:

- 1 Make Roma youth a strategic priority on international, European, national and local level agendas**
- 2 Ensure Roma youth participation in structures of representation and decision-making processes**
- 3 Provide capacity-building opportunities for Roma youth participation**
- 4 Empower Roma youth to be at the forefront in fighting antigypsyism**

We will now elaborate on each of these in turn.

1. Roma youth must be a strategic priority on international, European, national and local level agendas. Specific objectives, action plans and measures have to be defined, developed, implemented and monitored.

1.1 *At the international level, organizations and institutions with a legitimate mandate should target Roma youth through their strategic frameworks and policy work. We call upon:*

- The United Nations Envoy on Youth (UNEY)** to specifically refer to young Roma and to their situation in civic space
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** to promote education and employment measures for young Roma
- The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)** to effectively promote Roma and Sinti youth participation among its Member States
- The Council of Europe (CoE)** to continue and diversify its work on Roma youth, and adopt a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Roma Youth Participation
- The European Youth Forum** to initiate a Resolution with its member organizations to engage in challenging antigypsyism and active Roma youth participation, and to support the development and implementation of youth policies in line with the needs of Roma youth.

1.2 *At the international level, organizations and institutions with a legitimate mandate should target Roma youth through their strategic frameworks and policy work. We call upon:*

- The **DG EAC** of the European Commission to include Roma youth in the EU Youth Strategy up to 2027, and secure Roma youth participation in their decision-making processes, e.g., in Future National Activities Planners, EU Youth Dialogue and EU Youth Strategy Platform. Moreover, national youth strategies should be assessed against the criteria of inclusiveness and reference to active Roma youth participation. A post-2027 EU Youth Strategy must include and reflect upon the needs and challenges of young Roma people.
- The **DG Employment** of the European Commission to establish procedures and mechanisms to ensure that Roma NEET are specifically targeted at the national level and that they can benefit from the national measures for young people. Roma youth should be specifically included under programs such as 'Your First Eures Job' and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) under ESF+.
- The **DG EAC** of the European Commission to ensure equal access of Roma youth to general youth programs: Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and others.
- **SALTO Centers** and **Erasmus National Agencies** to build the capacity of Roma and Roma youth organizations to access training opportunities, Erasmus+ and ESC programs, and to mobilize Roma youth to benefit from these programs.
- **DG JUST** of the European Commission to ensure that National Roma Strategies under the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation up to 2030 explicitly target Roma Youth.

1.3 *National, local and regional governments should explicitly target Roma youth in both their mainstream and Roma-targeted policy work. We call upon:*

- Member States' **governments** to explicitly address young Roma in the renewed national Roma strategies.
- National, local and regional level **institutions and governmental agencies** to adequately address the needs of young Roma through a mainstream set of measures: ensure that youth/minorities/educational/social strategies, policies and programs include Roma youth as a cross-cutting target.
- The **managing authorities** of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) to include Roma youth in their local strategies by explicitly targeting Roma youth under their activities and their calls for proposals.

2. Relevant stakeholders must ensure and strengthen Roma youth participation in structures of representation (i.e., public administration, councils, etc.) and decision-making processes

2.1 *At the European and international level, we call upon*

- The **EU** to ensure that there are coordination mechanisms regarding Roma youth involving other international organizations such as **Council of Europe, ODIHR/OSCE and the United Nations**, but also a number of European networks and national organizations working on Roma youth.
- The **European Commission** to put a priority on investing into strengthening the role of Roma youth in decision-making, as well as in Roma and youth policies and structures.
- The **European Youth Forum and its Membership** to ensure the meaningful participation of Roma youth individuals and organizations in their structures.
- The **European Youth Forum and its Membership** to support the successful implementation of the new EU Roma Framework, especially when it comes to the empowerment and participation of Roma youth.

2.2 *At the national, regional and local level, we call upon*

- **National governments** to address young Roma as active agents of change. Together with national authorities Roma youth should contribute to the formulation of policies that adequately address the needs of young Roma.
- National **governments** and **National Roma Contact Points (NRCP)** and structures to involve young Roma as experts. Roma youth organizations have to be involved in the National Roma Platforms and in important consultation mechanisms concerning Roma and youth issues.
- **Governments** and **National Roma Contact Points (NRCP)** to include Roma youth in the design, implementation and monitoring of the national Roma strategies.
- **National Youth Councils** must actively seek to ensure the meaningful participation of Roma youth individuals and organizations in their structures.
- Roma youth to be involved in the work of **local youth parliaments and students' governments** (such as by universities).
- **Local youth parliaments and students' governments** (such as in universities) to involve Roma youth in their work.
- The **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** to include Roma youth as active members, especially in the design of the local action strategies.

3. Different actors and stakeholders must secure capacity-building opportunities for Roma youth participation: through information about and access to learning and training, employment/traineeship opportunities and funding.

3.1 *Information sharing opportunities and awareness raising campaigns*

- **European, national and local authorities and NGOs should** organize information sessions, forums, etc. targeting Roma youth about the opportunities available for their participation in these structures (both as stakeholders and beneficiaries).
- **European, national and local authorities and NGOs should** create outreach strategies to disseminate information for training and learning opportunities for Roma youth on various topics such as human rights, political participation, etc.
- **European, national and local authorities and NGOs should** support and organize more workshops, conferences, meetings, discussions for Roma youth and create opportunities for Roma youth-led work.

3.2 *Learning and training opportunities*

- The **OSCE/ODIHR**, the **CoE**, the **EC** and other organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to create training opportunities for developing the political skills of young Roma people in order to become political actors.
- **NGOs, EU and national programs** to design and implement projects that contribute to improving the digital competences of young Roma.
- **NGOs, EU and national programs** to regularly organize advocacy trainings for young Roma people.
- **NGOs, EU and national programs** to support and offer trainings and activities to boost Roma youth knowledge about EU and national level policy-making processes.

3.3 *Employment and traineeship*

- A wide range of internship and employment opportunities and programs must be created for young Roma at **EU institutions** (such as at the European Commission, European Parliament, European Council, European Central Bank, European Investment Bank, etc.) and by EU programs.
- A wide range of internship opportunities and programs must be created for young Roma within **national and local administration** by national parliaments, ministries and municipalities, and national programs.
- **National governments** should support different employment schemes for Roma youth in national level institutions and agencies working on Roma, youth and mainstream issues (i.e., national and local administration, national parliaments, ministries and municipalities).
- **National governments and agencies** should agree on a specific policy to hire young Roma in institutions/organizations that are creating policies for youth.

3.4 *Funding and support for Roma youth participation*

- The **European Commission** must put a priority on investing into the empowerment and capacity-building of Roma youth and Roma youth civil society.
- **EU, national and local programs** should support local informal groups (interest clubs and formations) NGOs and mediators to focus on specific projects about/for Roma youth (training, awareness raising on participation, civic education, and other activities).
- **National governments, higher education institutions and donors** in the educational field should provide scholarship for young Roma interested in politics, policy-making and public service.
- **European and national institutions** should financially support the participation of Roma young people in consultation processes and other institutionalized forms of civic engagement.

4. **International, EU, national, regional and local actors must commit to fighting against antigypsyism through:**

- Providing tools for young Roma to fight against discrimination, antigypsyism and hate-speech online and offline such as training, educational and financial resources.
- Providing Roma youth with spaces to express their cultural identity (i.e., Roma cultural centers, promote cultural activities and gatherings).
- Securing space for Roma youth to have editorial powers and ownership of Roma representation in mainstream media.
- Investing in programs encouraging Roma youth to research on Roma history, language and culture.
- Promoting awareness and recognition of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust.
- Including Roma history and culture in mainstream curricula since early age up to the end of secondary school.
- Educating on the Roma and Sinti Holocaust and developing teaching and educational materials by national governments and responsible ministries, involving Roma scholars and Roma civil society.
- Promoting the diversity and richness of Roma culture in schools (include famous Roma and positive, non-discriminative Roma images and stories).
- Investing in programs for young Roma to produce pieces of art in order to promote positive images of Roma through movies, videos, audios, theatre, paintings, photographs, books and others.

1. Name (optional): _____
2. Age: _____
3. City, neighborhood/country: _____
4. Gender: _____
5. Which of the following reflects best your current status/occupation?
☐ Employed (1) ☐ Student (2) ☐ Unemployed (3) ☐ Volunteering (4) ☐ Not in education (5)
 Other (6) _____
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
7. Do you Agree or Disagree with the following statements?
 I Agree (1) I Disagree (2) Not applicable (3)
☐ I choose not to identify myself as a Roma in certain situations
☐ I feel strongly disadvantaged in relation to the non-Roma youth (i.e. in society in general, at school)
☐ I observed and I encountered discriminatory words, behaviours or gestures directed at Roma
☐ I have encountered racism while attending school/ university
☐ I have been singled out in class and treated differently than other students because of my ethnicity
☐ I encountered discrimination while looking for employment/jobs
☐ I was denied entry to clubs, bars, sports and cultural events because of my ethnicity
8. What are the main concerns for you as a Roma youth? Select all that apply
☐ My nearby community
☐ Mobility within the European space
☐ Employment
☐ Access to education, training and schooling
☐ Access to health
☐ Racism and discrimination
☐ Sporting, entertainment and cultural life
☐ Participation in public and social life
☐ Hate-crime and hate-speech
☐ My personal and family life
☐ Police brutality
☐ Evictions (housing)
☐ Domestic violence
☐ Gender related issues (ex., early marriages)
☐ Access to justice
9. Who can help you/ support you address your concerns and needs?
☐ Friends
☐ Family
☐ Mentor(s)
☐ The nearby NGO
☐ The existing public institutions (ex., mayor, police)
☐ The religious leader in my community
☐ The political leader in my community
☐ The Roma related mediators in my community
☐ Other

10. What are the main sources of information-sharing (news, opportunities, future events) and communication among Roma youth?

- ☐ E-mail
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ NGOs
- ☐ Word of mouth (ex., talking with friends)
- ☐ Through different activities I have been involved in
- ☐ Other

11. Are you aware of Roma related (youth) NGOs in your area/country? If yes, please list them

12. Are you a member of an NGO/ movement/ association/ informal group, etc? If yes, please list

13. What motivates you/ would motivate you to be involved in Roma related activities and in promoting Roma rights? Select all that apply

- ☐ The idea that I can be part of changing things
- ☐ The racism I or people I know have encountered
- ☐ If the activities would be relevant/ interesting for me
- ☐ If there will be more diverse opportunities to volunteer
- ☐ If in the activities I go there are friends of mine/ people I know
- ☐ If I would better understand the situation of Roma
- ☐ If I would see the direct impact of my actions
- ☐ If the eligibility criteria were more transparent
- ☐ If there are no financial costs from my side
- ☐ If the activity is close by the place I live
- ☐ If the activity will be in another country
- ☐ If there is a safe space where I can feel free and included
- ☐ If I know the language of the event/activity

14. In which of the following activities you have been involved so far. Select all that apply

- ☐ I have participated in elections through voting (e.g. at the European, national, local level)
- ☐ I have participated in public hearings and consultations (local council, national parliament)
- ☐ I have organized/attended a protest against certain practices (e.g. racism, segregation)
- ☐ I have organized/attended a protest for changing/supporting some piece of legislation
- ☐ I have worked in the civil society sector (i.e. NGOs)
- ☐ I have organized/signed petitions (e.g. online, gathering signatures)
- ☐ I have been involved in political campaigning
- ☐ I have worked/interned for public institutions government (e.g. in the government, mayor)
- ☐ I have been volunteering abroad (i.e. through the European Voluntary Service)
- ☐ I am/ I have been a member of a political party
- ☐ I am/ I have been volunteering in my country (i.e. for religious, environmental causes)
- ☐ I have attended various workshops, seminars, events on Roma related topics
- ☐ I am/ I have been a member of a local action group
- ☐ I have monitored/reported hate-speech on social media and newspapers
- ☐ I am/ I have been a member of a youth council, student union and other youth related structure
- ☐ Other

15. Indicate how familiar you are with the following?

I have never heard of it (1) Somewhat familiar (2) I was beneficiary of it (3)

- ☐ The EU Youth Dialogue
- ☐ Erasmus +
- ☐ Discover EU
- ☐ The European Solidarity Corps
- ☐ Youth on the Move Initiative
- ☐ Your first EURES job
- ☐ The Youth Employment Initiative
- ☐ The Youth Guarantee
- ☐ The European Voluntary Service

16. Do you Agree or Disagree with the following statements? I Agree (1) I Disagree (2)

- ☐ Generally speaking, most of my experiences in Roma related activities have been good
- ☐ I felt empowered after I have attended Roma related activities
- ☐ I kept in contact with some of the participants after I have attended a Roma related event
- ☐ After I have attended a Roma related event/ activity, I kept in contact with the organizers
- ☐ I continued to receive information and news from the organizers of the Roma related events I attend

17. Assess from 1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 3 = 'Strongly agree' the potential barriers affecting your ability to participate and be engaged in issues affecting you?

- ☐ A lack of trust by young people in the state and public institutions
- ☐ Negative social attitudes to, and stereotyping, of young people
- ☐ No space for Roma youth in the mainstream youth structures
- ☐ Poor information about how to become involved in youth activities
- ☐ Insufficient time due to education and/or work obligations and family/friend commitments
- ☐ Not meeting the eligibility criteria
- ☐ Not being able to travel (EU mobility, gender)
- ☐ Hard to reach locations
- ☐ Skills deficits, for example in literacy, verbal skills and public speaking
- ☐ Lack of confidence
- ☐ Insufficient resources (ex., money)
- ☐ Minimal power given to young people to initiate change

18. Who should be doing what to help youth get publicly engaged in their communities/countries?

Select all that apply

- ☐ The (Roma) civil society organizations should support young Roma to participate
- ☐ The state I live in should be open to Roma youth
- ☐ Roma youth should organize themselves in a more strategic manner
- ☐ Each individual can make small steps for supporting other Roma
- ☐ The European community in general (i.e. EC, EP, OSCE, CoE) should do more
- ☐ Other

19. Do you feel that you can influence the following decisions that affect you?

Yes (1) No (2) I do not know (3)

- ☐ I can influence the decisions affecting me within my family
- ☐ I can influence the decisions affecting me in my area/ neighbourhood/city
- ☐ I can influence the decisions affecting me at the national level
- ☐ I can influence the decisions affecting me at the European level

20. Please write below any final comments or remarks on Roma youth civic and political participation

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