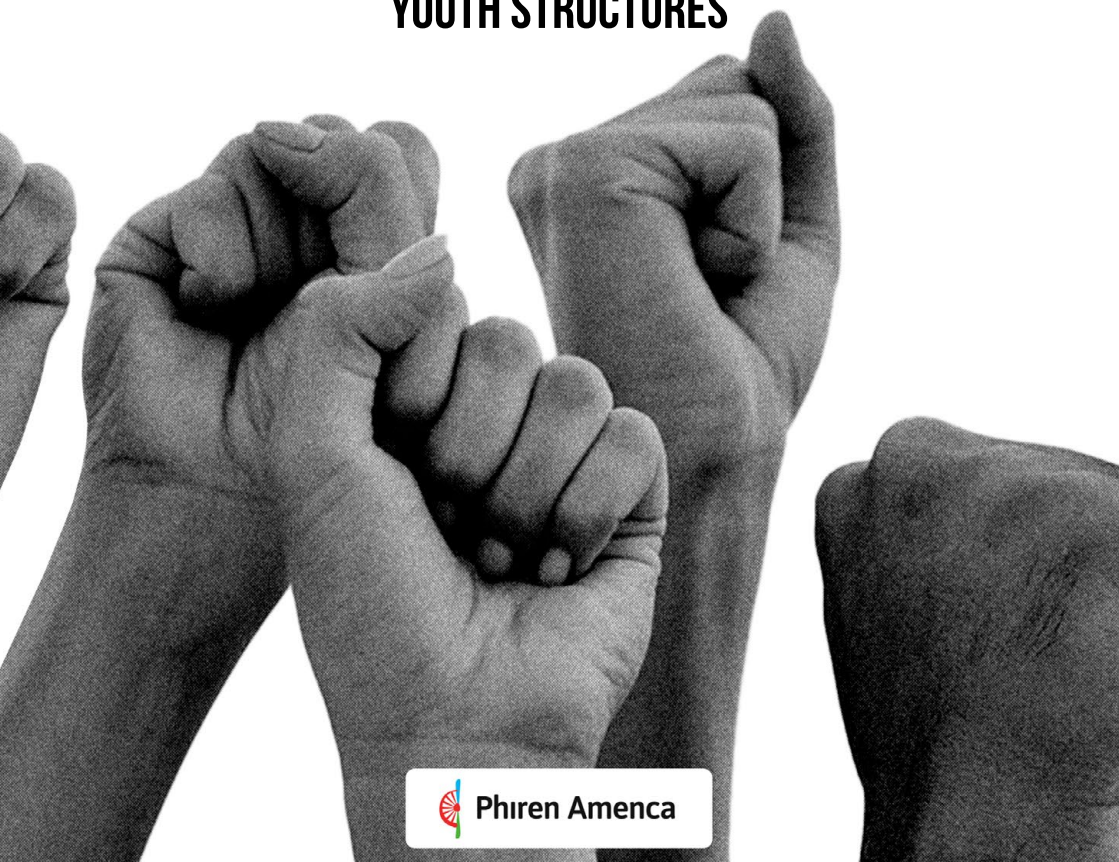


# **YOUTH AGAINST ANTIGYPSYISM**

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**ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION  
IN MAINSTREAM  
YOUTH STRUCTURES**



**Phiren Amencia**

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## I. FOREWORD

More than 12 million Roma live in Europe. More than half of them are young people.

In 2021 the Phiren Amenca International Network conducted [a bigger research](#) revealing that the most significant challenge for young Roma people all around Europe is not the typical transition from education to employment, but rather the persistent issue of antigypsyism. Shockingly, 95% of Roma youth have experienced discriminatory language, behaviour, and gestures directed at their community, with 68% encountering racism while attending educational institutions. This widespread antigypsyism and the lack of information about opportunities and platforms, hinder the participation of young Roma people in national youth policies and forums.

In line with the core European values of equality, diversity, and inclusion, this research endeavours to explore the extent to which these principles are put into practice at the national and regional levels by major European youth organizations, particularly by examining the national youth councils and international youth organizations affiliated with the European Youth Forum.

This study, entitled the "Roma Youth Participation in Mainstream Youth Structures" sheds light on the current state of Roma participation in mainstream youth organizations. While not claiming to be fully representative, this study aimed to assess whether national youth councils involved Roma youth organizations or individuals among their members, if their activities are involving or focusing on Roma youth and Roma youth issues and, are committed to furthering this cause. Our aim with this study was to map how much Roma youth are represented in national youth councils and by how much they can influence national policies, to highlight positive examples of Roma youth participation, as well as to identify persistent barriers that hinder Roma youth participation, particularly in European countries with a substantial Roma population.

In line with our work objectives, this study provides valuable recommendations for both national youth councils and international youth organizations on how to enhance their work in terms of equality, diversity, and inclusion, emphasizing steps to transform Roma youth participation from an absent component of European normality to a thriving reality.

The Phiren Amenca International Network expresses its gratitude to the European Youth Forum and all participants who contributed to this study, underscoring the collective commitment to achieving inclusion for all young people.

Marietta Herfort,  
Executive Director,  
Phiren Amenca International Network,  
Brussels, 2023

## INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Youth structures such as youth councils, youth organisations, youth clubs, student unions, etc., are considered key partners to be consulted on issues related to youth policies by European and national authorities and have the legitimate authority to formulate opinions and recommendations on youth issues. Recent EU initiatives on youth such as the Youth Guarantee<sup>1</sup> have left out Roma youth as key beneficiaries or target groups. This has shown the importance of having Roma youth representatives in key consultation mechanisms as a way to ensure the needs of Roma youth are addressed and acknowledged.

This research aims to uncover the key barriers Roma youth organizations face when it comes to their participation in mainstream youth structures such as national youth councils, international youth organizations, and networks, but also some of the efforts and good practices on enhancing Roma youth representation across Europe. The research is part of the Youth Against Antigypsyism (YAG) project<sup>2</sup> which aims to develop the capacity of young Roma and non-Roma individuals and NGOs to combat antigypsyism and promote Roma youth participation in mainstream structures, youth policies, and strategies relevant to Roma on the national and international levels.

Out of the total number of National Youth Councils (NYCs) members of the European Youth Forum contacted, only 11 have responded to Phiren Amenca's invitation to take part in the current research. Of them, only seven have Roma youth organisations as their members, and only four of them have Roma youth as an explicit focus of their work. This shows that NYCs's self-selection to take part in this research is given by their interest in Roma youth issues and the extent to which they have Roma youth organizations as their members or have specific activities, projects and policies targeting Roma youth. The research reveals that national youth councils are lacking proactive measures and intentional goals to include Roma youth substantively. Out of the ten Roma youth organizations surveyed and interviewed, only one of them is part of a National Youth Council.

Only three NYCs declared that they have a diversity and inclusion strategy: the British Youth Council, the National Youth Council of Spain, and the Irish National Youth Council. NYCs have employed diverse strategies to be more inclusive towards underrepresented groups. For example, subsidised or no NYC membership fees for those associations that cannot afford to pay it (i.e., Austria, Spain) or recruitment strategies and outreach that focuses specifically on those youth groups that are difficult to reach out.

Only six out of the 41 international non-governmental youth organisations - full members of the European Youth Forum - YFJ, responded to our research invitation. Only two of them have Roma youth members. Due to structural inequalities and discrimination, the European youth scene lacks a strong presence of Roma youth in international youth organizations. Our findings show that Roma youth presence in such structures is still restricted, however the profile of the INGYOs and the key issues they focus on (i.e., minorities) increase the likelihood to have Roma youth members of Roma youth related activities or projects in such INGYOs. Our research also shows that even those INGYOs that have a profile that is highly relevant for Roma youth - such as education, political participation, discrimination, etc. - do not have a Roma presence.

The key findings confirm that Roma youth are excluded from NYCs and INGYOs, and do not have access to networks and structures of representation. Such mainstream youth institutions do not target Roma youth specifically in their work, and policies and policymakers have yet to address systematically and continuously the needs of Roma youth in Europe. Roma youth representation and presence in these youth power structures need to be enhanced in order for policy-makers to be introduced to specific Roma youth initiatives. By having a lack of presence in such structures, Roma youth are excluded from shaping national and European youth initiatives, even though the 12 million Roma in Europe is a young population. On the one hand, the inability or the difficulty for such structures to include Roma youth is a result of the lack of openness of European youth structures towards Roma youth. On the other hand it is also due to the relatively weak Roma youth civil society sector and its presence and visibility at the national, regional or European level.

1 [The reinforced Youth Guarantee - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-employment-growth/youth-guarantee/)

2 <https://phirenamenca.eu/yag-youth-against-antigypsyism/>



## II. IMPORTANCE OF ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Roma youth participation is an important pillar of both youth and Roma policies. 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 presence, voices, needs and concerns of Roma youth. Roma youth are generally excluded from transnational and national youth structures, including National Youth Councils, and are not adequately represented and involved in Roma structures and civil society organizations.

In order to ensure that the needs of Roma youth are addressed, the representation of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations in both mainstream youth and Roma structures is paramount, not only as beneficiaries but also as full members with decision-making power. In this way, Roma youth can ensure the sustainability of the work Roma civil societies have done so far, strengthening the voice of Roma, and contributing to the diversification of Europe's youth.

At the national level, there is a lot of hope and desire among young Roma activists and NGOs for youth participation within the NYCs, mainstream youth NGOs and student associations, yet Roma youth presence in these structures is low or completely missing. In 2020, Phiren Amenca published the findings of the research project entitled "Roma Youth Participation in Europe: Challenges, Needs and Opportunities".<sup>3</sup> The research filled in an information gap about the public and political participation situation of young Roma in the European Union. Out of the 290 total number of respondents to an online questionnaire, only 18% of Roma youth 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.

Another study by the Council of Europe, the Roma Youth Participation and Inclusion in Standards, Policies, and Programmes in Europe (2020)<sup>4</sup> shows that mainstream youth institutions do not target Roma youth specifically in their work, and policies and policymakers have yet to address systematically and continuously the needs of Roma youth in Europe. National institutions have avoided recognizing and including the specific history, needs, and challenges of Roma youth in mainstream policies and measures. 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". It was also found that there is a lack of trust by young people in state and public institutions and a lack of space for Roma youth in mainstream youth structures,

with national youth councils lacking proactive measures and intentional goals to include Roma substantively.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ)<sup>5</sup> is an organisation that brings together over 100 youth organisations in Europe. In 2023, the Forum had a full membership of 41 international non-governmental youth organisations and 40 national youth councils (NYCs), one in each country. Among the international members, there has been no Roma representative. In November 2020 Phiren Amenca became a candidate member of the European Youth Forum.<sup>6</sup> This was an unprecedented achievement since no Roma organisation has ever achieved this status. This may be partially associated with the fact that the 2020-2023 YJF Strategic Plan,<sup>7</sup> included priorities such as the inclusion and diversity concerning marginalised and vulnerable communities, both to be mainstreamed within the platform and better reflected in the European societies. In line with the 2020-2023 YJF Strategic Plan, and in line with the 2020 YFJ Resolution on Combating Antigypsyism and the Inclusion and Equal Participation of Roma Youth, the YFJ resolves to address the participation of young Roma i.e., to ensure and support that Roma youth is addressed in both European and national mainstream youth policies, and that the equal participation of Roma youth organizations is strengthened.

Roma youth representatives' participation within the YFJ is important since this is the largest European umbrella youth network. Its main goals<sup>8</sup> are to increase the participation of young people and youth organisations in society, as well as in decision-making processes; to positively influence policy issues affecting young people and youth organizations, by being a recognized partner for international institutions, namely the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations; to promote the concept of youth policy as an integrated and cross-sectoral element of overall policy development; and to facilitate the participation of young people through the development of sustainable and independent youth organizations at the national and international level.

This research focuses on the participation of Roma youth individuals and civil society organizations within the member organizations of the YFJ – both NYCs and international youth organizations. Due to the lack of information on NYCs and Roma youth participation, and in order to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers or facilitating factors of this type of participation, this research aimed to fill this information gap. At the same time it can be an initial point to start a discussion within the YFJ about Roma youth participation and the ways it can be enhanced.

5 Only one NYC shall be accepted as a member in each European State, unless otherwise agreed by the General Assembly. More about the membership here <https://www.youthforum.org/our-members>

6 For more info see: [https://phirenamenca.eu/phiren-amenca-became-member-of-the-european-youth-forum/?fbclid=IwAR2Es8LslZB9kV9vsb0pC3v1tpSWBxmOhhU6\\_nnG6eCDOAn5752FWxWsrlU](https://phirenamenca.eu/phiren-amenca-became-member-of-the-european-youth-forum/?fbclid=IwAR2Es8LslZB9kV9vsb0pC3v1tpSWBxmOhhU6_nnG6eCDOAn5752FWxWsrlU)

7 European Youth Forum, Council of Members // Extraordinary General Assembly, STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2023 <[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0125-19\\_COMEM-II-19\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2020-2023\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0125-19_COMEM-II-19_Strategic_Plan_2020-2023_FINAL.pdf)> accessed 18 August 2020.

8 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/european-youth-forum>

3 "Roma youth participation in Europe: Challenges, needs and opportunities" – Research findings | Phiren Amenca

4 <https://rm.coe.int/study-on-roma-youth-participation-by-margareta-matache/1680a131e1>

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

In Europe, youth organizations and young people participate in programs, projects, workshops, seminars and other activities to exchange ideas, enhance their skills and capacities, and, more importantly, to define the policies that are affecting them. Roma youth and Roma youth organizations have a low presence in these structures and therefore little is expected to change with regards to advancing their position and interests. Intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and OSCE's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, have developed frameworks and strategies or have invested in creating a level playing field as a way to ensure participation and address Roma youth's unique requirements. Given the above, this research aims to answer:

What are the barriers to Roma youth and Roma youth organizations from participating in National Youth Councils and International Youth Organizations within the scope of the YFJ Membership?

This research aims to explore how Roma youth participation in structures of representation and decision-making processes can be strengthened and guaranteed by relevant stakeholders at the national and European levels (for a complete research plan see Annex 1).

With regards to the geographical focus, this research used a diverse case study approach. It includes countries that have been identified by previous research as having a focus on Roma youth (activities, projects, etc.) such as the National Youth Councils of Albania, North Macedonia, Austria, Spain, Slovakia, UK and Ireland; but also countries that have failed to include Roma youth and Roma youth NGOs in their structure even though the Roma population in those countries is rather significant: Serbia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Latvia.

In order to answer the above-mentioned research question, this research first embarked on desk research to find out what the roles, status, and composition of the youth councils are, as defined by the law; whether they are under the direct authority of the ministry in charge of youth policy or other ministries and units; who provides the necessary logistical and budgetary resources. In addition, since NYCs are often partners consulted on issues related to youth policies, the desk research also focuses on the key activities of the NYCs and their focus on Roma i.e., attracting members, projects, and activities.

To gain a general overview of the work of NYCs and international youth organizations (INGYOs) in relation to Roma youth, a second step survey was developed in order to map their work and build a taxonomy of types of engagement they promote with regards to

Roma youth. Survey results were used to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived barriers of Roma youth NGOs and structures to access mainstream youth networks, coalitions, and groups at the international level. In order to get a deeper understanding of different country cases, **interviews** were conducted with key NYCs representatives.

- a) For the **international youth non-governmental organizations**, the survey explored the following questions:
  1. What is the name of your organization?
  2. In which region/country do you operate?
  3. How many members, affiliates, or observers, does your organization have?
  4. Does your organization count among its members, affiliates, or observers, organizations representing or working with Roma young people? How many?
  5. Have you implemented any Roma youth-related project or activity? Please briefly describe.
  6. Do Roma young people participate in the design and implementation of policies and projects for Roma communities/people in your country/region?
  7. What are the main obstacles to equal participation of Roma young people in youth and Roma policy measures and programs in your country/region?
- b) For the NYCs, the survey explored the following questions:
  1. What national youth council do you represent?
  2. How many youth organizations are members of your national youth council?
  3. Do you have Roma youth organizations as members?
    - If, yes, how many organisations representing Roma young people does your youth council have as members? If yes, can you name them?
  4. Does your national youth council require a membership fee?
  5. What are the requirements for becoming a member of your national youth council?
  6. Assess the level of complexity of the procedure for becoming a member?
  7. Can you please elaborate on your recruitment strategy for new members?
  8. Does your national youth council have an inclusion and diversity strategy?
  9. Are Roma youth a topic of your work?
  10. Does your youth council have any specific project, activity, or policy regarding the participation of Roma young people?
  11. What are the main obstacles to equal participation of Roma young people in youth and Roma policy measures and programs in your country?

Last but not least, inputs from Roma and Roma youth organizations, were collected as a way to understand their the focus of their work, their capacity to join their NYCs, but also the extent to which they are familiar with the work of the NYC in their country, whether they have cooperated or part of the council, or ether they have considered applying for membership, and most importantly what are the key barriers for joining the council and what support would be needed to become members.

#### IV. ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN (INTER)NATIONAL YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout Europe, international youth organizations proved to be effective structures for shaping European youth policy agendas and influencing youth-related institutional procedures. However, like any other transnational advocacy structures with appointed elite representatives, there have been also concerns about the legitimacy of these representation structures and the extent to which they uphold procedural checks and balances, respect democratic processes, and transmit in an intact manner the grassroots message to the top, and the extent to which they act more on their behalf or on their constituencies. The relevance of this discussion with regard to Roma youth is whether INGYO's have Roma youth members or a Roma focus in their work and to understand the levels of participation and representation of Roma youth as members and/or beneficiaries of projects.

Due to structural inequalities and discrimination, the European youth scene lacks a strong presence of Roma youth international organizations. So far, three Roma youth international organizations have been present in the European youth scene: the Forum of European Young People (FERYP) - not active anymore, the International Roma Youth Network ternYpe, and the Phiren Amenca International Network - structures that represented the interests of Roma youth at the European level. These organizations have been asked to consult within international entities such as the Council of Europe and other institutions, and have also mobilized a significant number of Roma youth through their international events.<sup>9</sup> While FERYP ceased to exist due to a management crisis, the ternYpe network maintains its activities mostly around the "Dikh he na Bister" (Look and don't forget) Roma youth genocide remembrance initiative that takes place once a year. This leaves Phiren Amenca with a great responsibility to advocate for the issues of Roma youth before youth, Roma and other civil society organizations.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) has a full membership of 41 international non-governmental youth organisations, with Phiren Amenca receiving a candidate status in 2020. As part of this research, all INGYO's members of the YFJ have been contacted by email, social media (including YFJ-related WhatsApp and Facebook groups and pages), and also through the YFJ newsletter to respond to the survey. The survey has been answered by the following INGYO's:

- Youth of European Nationalities (YEN JEV)
- Youth Express Network (frYEN)
- European Students' Union (ESU)
- Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
- European Democrat Students (EDS)
- European Youth Press (EYP)

Based on the answers received and the Roma youth-related membership and work, the INGYO's have been categorized into three main types:

- 1) INGYO's that have Roma youth as members and are also working on Roma youth.
- 2) INGYO's with sporadic Roma youth individuals as part of their structures and with some interest in focusing more on Roma youth.
- 3) INGYO's with no Roma youth members and work on Roma youth.

Considering the low response rate of INGYO's for this research, the research does not claim to be representative.

#### INGYOS WITH ROMA YOUTH MEMBERS AND WORK ON ROMA YOUTH

Out of the total number of self-selected INGYO's respondents, members of the YFJ, only two of them stated that they have Roma youth as an explicit focus, and/or they have Roma youth organizations and individuals as part of their structures: the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN JEV) and the Youth Express Network (frYEN).

Similarly, the Council of Europe study<sup>10</sup> showed that there are several international organizations that have Roma members, yet, as the other two categories below show, this is not the norm, and Roma representation and presence in these youth power structures need to be enhanced in order for policy-makers to be introduced to specific Roma youth initiatives.

Within the scope of the YFJ membership, the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN JEV) is one of the few examples of INGYO's with a relatively good Roma youth presence. Operating throughout Europe and having 41 member organisations from 18 countries, Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) is the largest network of youth organizations of

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2016/jasharov\\_jashar.pdf](https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2016/jasharov_jashar.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/study-on-roma-youth-participation-by-margareta-matache/1680a131e1>



autochthonous, national, and linguistic minorities in Europe. YEN is run and led by young people, for young people, and it sees itself as a self-determined and self-organized youth organization, whose activity is carried out and determined by youth.<sup>11</sup>

Given the profile of the organization, and its focus on minorities, YEN has two member organisations that work with and/or are led by Roma young people: "YEN is an organisation for national, ethnic and linguistic minorities. Roma youth is on the one hand part of our target group, on the other hand, we address the situation of Roma in Europe specifically as it differs significantly from other national, ethnic and linguistic minorities. YEN aims to create solidarity with and more understanding for Roma communities" stated YEN's representatives.

YEN also has a diversity and inclusion strategy which is reflected in their work since it aims to include a diverse group of young people in all their activities: "Not an activity that is only focused on Roma youth, but it is part of all our activities in some form. As YEN we did not implement a project specifically for Roma, but in our member organisations working for/being led by Roma this is the case."

For example, in 2014, together with Vlach Youth Council of N. Macedonia and the Association of Citizen Sumnal, YEN organized the Roma Strategy start-up in Ohrid;<sup>12</sup> in 2019, together with ternYpe International Roma Youth Network and others, YEN organized a seminar on the topic of minority youth and the European Parliament elections;<sup>13</sup> in 2020, they featured a podcast within its MYnority MYsay series with Marge, a Sinti girl from Germany.<sup>14</sup>

Another INGYO that fits into this category is the Youth Express Network (frYEN). frYEN is a European network of grassroots youth organizations, whose vision is "to reach an inclusive society, where young people, their needs and participation are recognized, valued and appreciated".<sup>15</sup> In addition to its YFJ membership, frYEN is also a full member of the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe, which has the potential to create additional entry points for specific Roma youth advocacy and representation points.<sup>16</sup> According to the Database of the Council of Europe, 28 out of the 301 INGOs have a competence in Roma and Travellers (which includes the European Roma and Travellers Forum as well).<sup>17</sup>

frYEN's 30 member organizations covering 19 countries work at all levels on the social inclusion of young people count three member organizations representing or working with Roma young people, among which RROMA (North Macedonia), Asociatia Nevo Parudimos/Centrul de Voluntariat Resita (Romania) and AmaroDrom (Germany): "We encourage young people with fewer opportunities to make their voice heard in local, regional and international institutions, either by representing them or supporting them to create and be part of youth councils and youth initiatives".<sup>18</sup> frYEN has a diversity and inclusion strategy and Roma youth are a topic of their work, with frYEN management structure always asks their members who directly target Roma youth to send participants to their projects. They also contribute to the implementation and design of their projects.

For example, in 2013, frYEN together with ternYpe (International Roma Youth Network) organized the seminar "Where do you(th) belong?" with the aim to discuss and create an exchange about citizenship from different perspectives: What does it mean for young people with fewer opportunities and what are the challenges to access and enjoy full citizenship for these young people? In 2019, frYEN has involved its Roma youth organization members in the Shake the Box! - Alternative ways of participation! Project,<sup>19</sup> implemented training courses on how to work and involve Roma youth in European youth work and developed several toolkits about it (i.e., Working with young people from Vulnerable groups, Toolkit Inclusive European Youth Projects).<sup>20</sup> In 2021, it partnered with Amaro Foro e.V. for the youth exchange "Mingle and Exploring Human Rights in Europe!" with the aim to engage young leaders, especially Roma and marginalized youth to promote democracy, human rights, access to free public information, and to advocate for their rights.

Such examples are encouraging both in terms of Roma membership and activities. However, extensive research is needed to understand the levels of participation and representation of Roma youth as members and/or beneficiaries of projects.

11 [YEN – Youth of European Nationalities – The Youth of European Nationalities \(YEN\) is an European network of minority youth organisations. \(yeni.org\)](#)

12 [Roma Strategy start up in Ohrid/ Macedonia – YEN – Youth of European Nationalities \(yeni.org\)](#)

13 [CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS "Minority Youth and the EU Elections-Seminar" – deadline: February 24th! – YEN – Youth of European Nationalities \(yeni.org\)](#)

14 [MYnority MYsay! – the podcast by YEN is online! – YEN – Youth of European Nationalities](#)

15 [About - Youth Express Network](#)

16 The Conference facilitates the participation of organised civil society in the work of the Council of Europe. It serves as a platform where civil society can interact with the Council of Europe in the attainment of its goals. It also promotes participatory democracy, active citizenship and freedom of association.

17 [INGO Database \(coe-ngo.org\)](#)

18 [About - Youth Express Network](#)

19 [Shake the box Archives - Youth Express Network](#)

20 [Working with young people from Vulnerable groups.pdf - Google Drive](#) and [Toolkit Inclusive European Youth Projects.pdf - Google Drive](#)

## INGYOS WITH AN INTEREST ON FOCUSING MORE ON ROMA YOUTH

Out of the total number of INGYOs respondents, two of them stated that they do have a sporadic, non-explicit focus on Roma youth individuals as part of their structures, and they are also interested in focusing more on Roma youth. Below illustrates the work of such organizations and points out the challenges in advancing their work with/for Roma youth. Both the INGYOs in this category focus on education-related issues: Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) and European Students Union (ESU). They have an important relevance for Roma youth since education is one of the areas Roma children and youth are faring the worst.

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the platform for cooperation between about 35 national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe.<sup>21</sup> The other organization, the European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 countries. With regards to OBESSU, given their mandate, Roma youth is a topic that gets to be tackled by them when talking about inclusion in education. For example, in 2020, together with other European networks including ERGO Network, OBESSU took part in a roundtable discussion on the inclusion and accessibility of citizenship education and the role of non-formal education at the European level.<sup>22</sup>

The European Students Union (ESU), on the other side, aims to represent and promote the educational, social, economic, and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow-Up Group, Council of Europe, and UNESCO.<sup>23</sup> Within the European higher education sphere, ESU - representing national student unions and organizations - is one of the key actors. Even though ESU has 45 members and 13 associate members it is not clear how many of them represent or work with Roma young people: "As our members are national student unions and those represent all students of their country, Roma students are theoretically represented through this. With a view to our associate members e.g., the European Union of Jewish Students is a member, but so far we do not have a separate entity as the associate member that specifically represents Roma students."

Examples across Europe have shown that in the last five years or so, there are several local organizations focusing on Roma in higher education e.g., CampusRom in Spain,<sup>24</sup>

Terni Godi Roma Students Association from Bucharest,<sup>25</sup> yet, in many cases such organizations have difficulties in reaching out to Roma university students and run large scale projects. Indeed, the issues affecting Roma youth participation in higher education considerably affect the existence and strengths of the Roma university, national, or transnational representation structures. As previous research conducted by Phiren Amenca has shown, out of the 290 respondents, only 53 stated that they were members of youth councils, student unions, and other youth-related structures. In Romania, a student representative pointed out that student associations do not work on Roma issues because Roma do not represent a significant number of students either within their university or at the national level.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout the years, ESU has strengthened its position within the European higher education space, especially because governments and university leaders are "forced" to include the participation of student stakeholders in decision-making processes in the interest of effective policy formulation, legitimising adopted policy, and accountability.<sup>27</sup> ESU is the only transnational student association that is regularly invited to the meetings of the EU Directors General for Higher Education, and it holds a representational monopoly within the European Higher Education Area.

One of its biggest achievements was the introduction of the social dimension (social inclusion) within the European Higher Education Area, however it is a commitment that European member states and universities are still struggling to implement. ESU was among the first entities to define access inequalities and the insufficient studying and living conditions of students and later became a strong advocate for structural policy changes. Despite this, Roma youth is not a topic of focus in itself for ESU. As reported in the survey, the organization works on topics of discrimination (such as racism) in higher education, and thus Roma is worked on under the broader umbrella of combating racism. However, there is no specific work dedicated to antigypsyism in itself.

ESU stated that the main obstacles to equal participation of Roma young people in youth and Roma policymaking and/or policy consultation mechanisms are mainly related to the fact that Roma is generally part of the so-called vulnerable, underrepresented and marginalized student groups: "Within higher education, the specific forms of discrimination and the obstacles members of the Roma community experience and are facing, are often not known. Often policy specifically aimed at the communities' access to education regards primary and secondary education but seldom tertiary education." ESU has shown interest in approaching the topic of Roma students, yet the lack of

21 [OBESSU - European Students' Union \(esu-online.org\)](https://www.esu-online.org/)

22 [\(1\) Facebook](#)

23 [Home - European Students' Union \(esu-online.org\)](https://www.esu-online.org/)

24 [Gitanos En La Universidad | CampusRom Red Gitana Universitaria](#)

25 [Facebook](#)

26 [http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2020/torotcoi\\_simona.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2020/torotcoi_simona.pdf)

27 Klemenčič, M., & Galán Palomares, F. M. (2018). Transnational student associations in the European multi-level governance of higher education policies. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(3), 365–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904117736428>



sustainable Roma partners has posed significant challenges.

By a lack of representation in structures such as OBESSU and ESU, Roma youth are missing an opportunity to present key issues they are facing in education and also to advocate for inclusive education in Europe.

### INGYOS WITH NO ROMA YOUTH MEMBERS AND WORK ON ROMA YOUTH

Out of the six INGYOs responding to our survey, two of them stated that they do not have Roma youth members in their structure, that they do not work on Roma youth issues, nor have they implemented any Roma youth-related project or activity. Below, we will illustrate the work of such organizations and what missed opportunities they employ for Roma youth.

The European Democrat Students (EDS) "is a pan-European centre-right student and youth political association, and the official student organization of the European People's Party. Founded in Vienna by Scandinavian, German, and Austrian students in 1961, it represents over 1,600,000 students and young people in 40 member organizations from 35 countries in Europe and is the largest youth organization in Europe."<sup>28</sup> Despite its position, EDS has no Roma youth members, and they do not work on Roma youth topics, yet, in their response, it was stated that EDS has an inclusion and diversity strategy and diversity is one of its core values. EDS aims to promote "a free, democratic, and united Europe" through greater student mobility and comprehensive education policies across the continent. EDS portrays itself as a frontrunner in integration, a united Europe and debates in European politics. Such youth structures as the EDS can also be considered favourable for enhancing Roma youth political participation. Practice has shown that political parties involve young people mainly in their youth-related activities or structures. Here, young people have the opportunity to both develop their political skills but also to contribute to shaping the political party vision with regard to youth policies (i.e., EDS Winter University). They can also support youth in participating in different trainings, and events that are in line with the party's political ideology and values (i.e., EPP Women Congress).

Roma youth would benefit greatly by tapping their potential through such youth factions. The inclusion of Roma youth in INGYOs affiliated with politics would not only ensure that its members would have a more comprehensive view on Roma topics but that they will also develop empathy and solidarity towards Roma as future politicians.

The European Youth Press (EYP) is an umbrella organization of young media makers in Europe, with the mission to strengthen the role of youth media and promote freedom of the press in Europe.<sup>29</sup> It has seven executive board members and about 30 member

organizations all over Europe. Unfortunately, the EYP did not confirm if there are any Roma young people involved, yet they are sure that they do not have any Roma in their executive and advisory structures.

The inclusion of Roma youth in the activities of EYP can have a significant positive impact on Roma in Europe. For example, RomaReact<sup>30</sup> was a civic journalism platform in which young Roma reported directly online, different aspects or issues from their localities, highlighting issues and promoting a positive image of Roma. Given the increasing level of negative representation of Roma in the media and in the public space, supporting young Roma journalists to report on Roma issues would create added value for EYP and not only. When asked what the main obstacles are to equal participation of Roma young people the EYP representative stated that "EYP was not so successful to find a way yet to reach Roma young people who are young journalists and media makers (our target group). We have to improve this, but we don't know yet how." In this context, tools such as the "Toolkit for pro-Roma engagement" can be useful for EYP and other organizations as they offer practical guidelines for all Roma and non-Roma people who want to join together and engage in actions for equal rights.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude, over the last two decades or so, in Europe, international youth organizations have played a significantly increasing role in the transnational political and policy-making realm. INGYOs have received notice mostly in regard to their dissemination of influence and power within the European discourse, mainly due to their geographical coverage, shared values across the membership, scope of work, and performance with regard to policy advocacy. Our findings show that Roma youth presence in such structures is still restricted, however the profile of the INGYOs and the key issues they focus on (i.e., minorities) increase the likelihood to have Roma youth members or Roma youth related activities or projects.

Despite this, the findings also show that even those INGYOs that have a profile that is highly relevant for Roma youth - such as education, political participation, discrimination, etc. - do not have a Roma presence. By lacking a presence in such structures, Roma youth are excluded from shaping national and European youth initiatives, even though the 12 million Roma in Europe is a young population.

On the one hand, the inability or the difficulty of INGYOs to include Roma youth is a result of the lack of openness of European youth structures towards Roma youth (see the examples of positive practices and approaches above), on the other hand it is also due the relatively weak Roma youth civil society sector and its presence and visibility at the national, regional or European level.

<sup>28</sup> [History – European Democrat Students \(edsnet.eu\)](https://edsnet.eu)

<sup>29</sup> [youthpress.org](https://youthpress.org)

<sup>30</sup> [Roma React | How Happy we are](https://roma-react.eu)

<sup>31</sup> [ENGAGE Toolkit.pdf \(sav.sk\)](https://engage-toolkit.pdf(sav.sk))

## V. ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS

In Europe, NYCs<sup>32</sup> are representative youth bodies which have a consultative role to the discussion and definition of youth policies. They have the right to formulate opinions and recommendations on youth issues directed to policy-making bodies at all levels of government. At the national level, youth councils are often umbrella organisations representing youth associations, local and regional youth councils, youth unions as well as individual young people.

In most cases, the establishment, role, and composition of the youth councils are defined by law. Some of them are under the direct authority of the ministry in charge of youth policy, which provides the necessary logistical and budgetary resources. In other countries, youth councils are non-governmental organizations without an official legal basis. They are usually constituted by several associations representing young people or by a network of local youth councils. However, they are considered key partners to be consulted on issues related to youth policies by the national authorities, and as such entitled to receive funding from public sources.

Out of the total 39 NYCs contacted, only ten have responded to Phiren Amenca's designated survey for NYCs, yet not all questions have been answered. The survey was open from April to August 2023 and it was disseminated (a) by email (as indicated on the NYCs webpages), (b) through the YFJ newsletter, (c) on social media YFJ groups and channels, and (d) through a presentation at the at the General Assembly of the European Youth Forum in Brussels, in April 2023, where a series of in-person interviews have been conducted with NYCs representatives.

The survey has been answered by the following youth councils:

- the Austrian National Youth Council (59 full members)
- the National Youth Council of North Macedonia (48 full members)
- the Slovak Youth Council (29 full members)
- the British Youth Council (180 full members)
- the National Youth Council of Ireland (56 full members)
- the National Youth Council of Latvia (51 full members)
- the National Youth Council of Serbia (111 members)
- the National Youth Council of Slovenia (13 members)
- the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria (28 members)
- the Spanish Youth Council (15 Regional Youth Councils with around +1100 regional youth associations inside, 47 full member associations, 19 observer associations and around + 30 agreements of participation with national association members).

This research is based on the input received from 11 NYCs. In order to get a more thorough understanding of their work, in addition to the survey responses, four additional interviews were conducted, three of them with NYCs have already answered the survey - the Austrian (Sophie Hammer), Macedonian (Filip Kulakov) and Spanish (Xabier Triana Gomez) National Youth Councils - and the remaining one with the representative of the Albanian National Youth Council (Klaidi Priseka) even though they did not respond to the survey.

### THE GENERAL NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS' CONTEXT

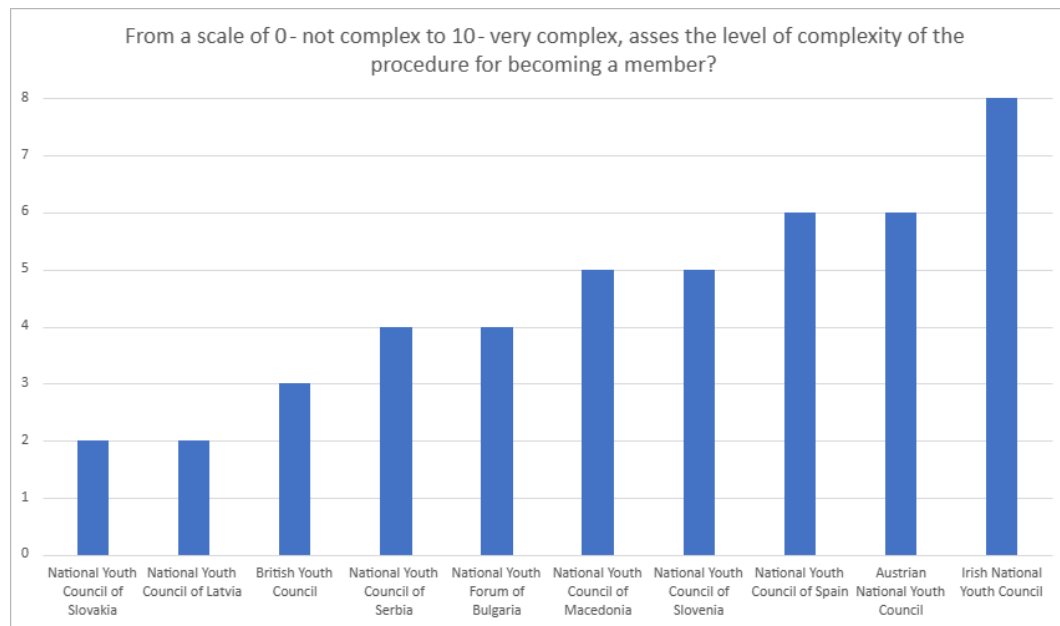
In what follows, based on the answers received, the report presents a general overview of the recruitment strategies for organizations wishing to become NYCs members, the criteria that the surveyed NYCs use when considering application for NYCs membership, and the range of membership fees and contributions as key features for assessing the level of openness and inclusivity of the NYCs. The section also provides an overview of the existence of a diversity and inclusion strategy, and most importantly the state of Roma youth organizations as members, and Roma youth as a focus of NYCs' work.

With the hope that some NYCs would engage more systematically to reach out to underrepresented youth groups, including Roma, NYCs representatives were asked to elaborate on their recruitment strategy for new members. While some choose to follow the classical recruitment approach with opening calls for membership, social media posts, and a website section on new membership (i.e., Bulgaria), other NYCs employ different strategies such as reaching out to potential organizations, with a focus on underrepresented groups, or having a designated structure to deal with recruitment and reach out.

When it comes to the requirements for NYCs membership, the situation differs significantly across the surveyed NYCs. This is given by the level of complexity of the procedure and the criteria for membership. Figure 1 below illustrates the self-assessment of the surveyed with regard to the level of procedural complexity for becoming a member of the NYC, with Slovakia and Latvia as the least complex and Austria and Ireland the most complex.

<sup>32</sup> <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/comparative-overviews/participation/national-youth-councils/2019>

Figure 1. The level of procedural complexity for becoming a NYCs member



Despite the fact that the Austrian NYC representatives self-assessed themselves as quite complex in admitting new members, among all the respondents only in Austria is there no membership fee for the NYCs members. In other countries, the fee can range between a complete exemption for those associations that cannot afford to pay it (i.e., Spain), flexibility depending on the number of young people represented by the organization (i.e., Great Britain), or relative to the income of the organization (i.e., Ireland), or depending on the type of membership: 30 euros for full members, 20 euros for associated members in Latvia, or approx. 35 euros for associated members and approx. 75 euros for full members, in Serbia, and even higher fees in Bulgaria where the fee ranges between 107 and 164 euros yearly for full-right members and 61 euros yearly for associated members. North Macedonia has a fixed fee of 65 euros, whereas Slovakia has a maximum membership fee of 150 euros. The highest fees are in Slovenia - 210 euros for full members per year, and in Ireland - ranging between 500 euros per annum and rising up to 2500 euros relative to the income of the organization.

Out of the total number of respondents, only three of them declared that they have a diversity and inclusion strategy: the British Youth Council, the Spanish Youth Council of Spain, and the National Youth Council of Ireland. In addition, seven out of the total number of respondents (half of them with a diversity and inclusion strategy) stated that they have Roma youth organizations as their members, these are:

1. Slovak Youth Council
2. British Youth Council
3. National Youth Council of Albania
4. National Youth Council of Serbia
5. National Youth Council of North Macedonia
6. Spanish Youth Council
7. Austrian National Youth Council

When asked whether Roma youth are a topic of their work, it was revealed that only 4 NYCs have an explicit focus on Roma youth: Ireland, Spain, Albania and North Macedonia.

Based on the answers received and the Roma youth-related membership and work, the NYCs have been categorised into two main types: 1) NYCs that have Roma youth as members and are also working on Roma youth; 2) NYCs with no Roma youth members but with sporadic Roma youth individuals as part of their structures, and with some interest in focusing more on Roma youth.

#### NYCS WITH ROMA YOUTH MEMBERS AND WORK ON ROMA YOUTH

Seven out of the eleven NYCs taking part in our research have Roma youth organizations as members: the Albanian, the North Macedonian, the Austrian, the Spanish, the Slovak, the British and the Irish National Youth Councils.

#### ALBANIA

The NYC of Albania was formed in 2013 in the presence of almost 40 youth organizations, and youth entities and subjects in the country. It was formalized as a legal structure by the end of 2015-2016. At that time in 2016, it also had membership from a member who had in its scope the work on/with the Roma community.

The Albanian National Youth Council has certain criteria to become a member, but a key requirement is to state that they are a youth structure with youth work and specific youth statutes. Their representative stated that they avoid the term organizations since membership is open to different entities that do not need to be registered as an organization. Membership is open to non-formal groups, formed in front of a notary. The council is also open to political youth forums or political parties, to the students,



unions or faculties of universities in Albania, with no requirement for a membership fee, yet future plans envision such a contribution during the 11th General Assembly. After two years of membership those member organizations or entities, except the youth political forums, can run for board members. Currently, there are three Roma structures part of the NYC: Roma Active Albania, Amaro-Drom Association and Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA).

From 2022, the Albanian NYC has created a granting scheme for projects in several thematic areas such as creative economy and innovation, culture, youth develop capacities, youth are Europeans, youth spaces, youth eco-health, etc. This happened in the frame of Tirana European Youth Capital and aimed at granting projects to organizations, to non-formal groups, and to individuals (from 18 to 29) in eight different thematic fields with grants from 6,000 euros (for individuals), 12,000 euros (for non-formal groups), and up to 65,000 (formal entities). The Albanian NYC representative stated that many Roma youth individuals and structures applied for these grants. The NYC has taken responsibility for the management of these public funds mainly because there were major governmental and ministerial delays in distributing this public money.

Several organizations that focus on the Roma community applied for projects, in youth, art, youth and diversity, and also in youth creative economy and innovation: "In my program, which is youth makes creative economy and innovation, I have been in constant touch with organizations from the Roma community, that have applied for funds and then have been granted funds to help young people from the community to get digital skills to open startups and to meet with business owners that have the money to fund their ideas" said Klaidi Priseka, the representative of the Albanian NYC. In addition, through Roma Active Albania, So keres Europe 2022<sup>33</sup> was co-funded under the Tirana European Youth Capital 2022.

The Albanian NYC is very aware of the diversity issue, and they have a dedicated program for diversity with about 50 projects. Diversity and inclusion is not only about Roma but also about the LGBTQ+ community, and others from different underrepresented communities, and rural areas.

It was also added that Roma youth participation is not in a bad state in Albania, and this is mainly because Roma youth who are considered as part of the community are always presenting themselves as I'm from the Roma community, and I'm Albanian: "And what is different, I think in Albania, is that Roma community, of course, acknowledges that they are part of the community, but at the same time the Albanian community in general, it's more open towards Roma and other groups. Of course, there are many components in the population that are discriminatory, but I think, in general, we are very open" said Klaidi Priseka, the representative of the Albanian NYC.

<sup>33</sup> See more at: [So Keres Europa | Phiren Amencia](#)

The NYC has a close relationship with its members, and therefore its strength plays an important role in national youth policy-making. For example, it was advocating for the adoption of the national strategy on youth 2023-2029: "We consulted with a lot of member organizations, including Roma ones, for the positions that will push forward in the strategy and we were part of the organizations that took part in the ministerial consultations" said Klaidi Priseka, the representative of the Albanian NYC.

## NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonian NYC was established in 2013. Its role has been primarily to advocate for the access of young people in policy and decision-making processes, but also to ensure that young people have access to their own rights. Youth policies are scattered among the different institutions and ministers, and the council has maintained a strong cooperation with the National Agency for Youth and Sports, which is the main institution responsible for youth policies, and it also cooperates with the government, and with the parliament, with a youth club on Youth Affairs and Policies being hosted by the parliament. In addition, the council cooperates with the Ministry of Education and Science, but this cooperation level has been quite low. When it comes to official recognition of the National Youth Council, the Council is not officially recognized by the government and it does not have any government funding.

Based on its current strategic plan, the N. Macedonian NYC has two main priorities: (1) to strengthen and affirm the role in the position of the National Youth Council not only at the national level, but on the regional and international level, mainly through the youth regional processes in the Western Balkans and within the European Youth Forum; and (2) to strengthen the membership and youth civil society organizations in North Macedonia, their capacities and their access to funding: "When it comes to our advocacy initiatives, our role is to ensure that young people have access in decision policymaking processes, that they have access to their rights, and they're being represented in the policies that are being created for them" stated Filip Kulakov, the N. Macedonian NYC representative.

For example, when it comes to its regional work, it is mainly related to the Western Balkans Six<sup>34</sup> and the so-called connecting youth platform, where its members engage for the exchange of best practices for joint advocacy efforts. "For example, the Youth Guarantee is being deployed all over the Western Balkans and North Macedonia was actually the first non-EU country to implement the Youth Guarantee outside of the EU. So, our experience has been valued by all our partners from the Western Balkans, because they wanted to discuss all the different things that we've experienced, not only in the policy design but also in the implementation" stated Filip Kulakov, the N. Macedonian NYC representative.

<sup>34</sup> [Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum - WB6 CIF](#)

The N. Macedonian NYC representative perceived its participation within the European Youth Forum beneficial and enriching, especially since he has been advocating for more presence of non-EU and Western Balkan people in their representation in many processes: "We were also positively surprised when they did the unpaid internships campaign and research and they also included North Macedonia and Serbia. I think while the Youth Forum does its job, it's a good reminder from time to time that yes, we are here, and you're not only representing young people in the EU, but young people across all regions of Europe" stated Filip Kulakov, the N. Macedonian NYC representative.

The National Youth Council of N. Macedonia has a designated structure to deal with recruitment and reach out. In N. Macedonia, the NYC has a Program for Strategic Development, and one of its focuses is dealing with the membership, but also mapping out potential members. In addition to this, the NYCM has its Membership Commission that deals with recruitment as well. There are also seven regional offices throughout the country that inform and engage local youth organizations and map them for potential membership in the council.

In North Macedonia, about six out of the 48 member organisations represent Roma young people in the NYC as members or affiliates. Roma youth organizations have been part of the council events since its foundation. Currently, there are several Roma youth organizations part of the NYC specifically addressing their issues and concerns (i.e., RROMA, Sumnal), but there are also other youth organizations that within their work put a specific focus on Roma youth as a target group: "Within our values, we have been always explicitly noting that the National Youth Council represents young people regardless of all of their background, ethnic, racial, etc, that we represent all diverse categories of young people. And that is very important to us. And I think also a positive example is that even within our governing board members, we have also had representatives of the Roma community and that is also a major influence for the Roma youth organizations" stated Filip Kulakov, the N. Macedonian NYC representative.

The NYC in North Macedonia aims to address Roma youth challenges throughout its work on all levels - local, national, and international. Over the last couple of years, it organized a Study Session on Roma Youth Participation with partners from NYCs from Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine, as well as partner Roma youth organizations<sup>35</sup>. In addition to this, as of 2023, it implements a project dealing with social entrepreneurship, where special focus is given to employment opportunities for Roma youth. Also, NYCM annually recognizes young people with the Youth Civic Engagement Award, and in the history of the award, many Roma youth organizations and activists were recipients of the award.

The NYC in North Macedonia, as one of the implementing partners of the Youth Guarantee, also aims to engage Roma youth in this mechanism. In the past couple of years, a significant focus was given to Roma youth, especially because "they are often in segregated communities, and do not have that much easy access to public institutions, and if they have the access, they do not have the trust in them and tend to avoid those types of processes". The N. Macedonian NYC has been singled out by the European Parliament due to its notable partnership between the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in terms of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, knowing that a significant number of Roma young would fit into this category "We have been partnering with Roma youth organizations which have been engaging young Roma activists and field workers in their own communities in order to inform their peers about how they can benefit from these programs" stated Filip Kulkov, the N. Macedonian NYC representative.

One of the main challenges that are faced by Roma youth, is in fact youth participation. There is a need to strengthen the capacities and knowledge of Roma youth organizations about the existing mechanisms for participation in policy- and decision-making. In addition, the social exclusion of Roma (especially from the educational system) leads towards distrust in the institutions and their processes, whereas systemic discrimination from the side of the institutions also poses significant challenges for youth participation.

## AUSTRIA

The Austrian Youth Council was founded in 2001, and it is the legal representative structure of all young people in Austria between newborns to 30 year olds, having a secured seat at the table concerning youth representation. For example, whenever there is a new legislative proposal that concerns or affects youth, the youth council is invited to provide feedback and bring in perspectives that are probably not considered by policymakers "Because we are the official interest representation of young people, if there's a topic discussed, we are often invited to the table" says Sophie Hammer, the Austrian NYC representative.

When asked about the specific priorities of the youth council, the Austrian representative stated that their last priority was the recognition of youth work. Together with their member organizations, the council hired a research institute to do a study on the effects of youth work, especially in youth organizations, and on young people. Other current priorities include mental health, children's rights, and security. Such priorities are decided for a one-year period by the board, as a result of the key issues affecting young people in Austria.

<sup>35</sup> [Multi sectoral cooperation for inclusion of Roma youth and marginalized groups - Roma Youth Participation \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portal/multi-sectoral-cooperation-for-inclusion-of-roma-youth-and-marginalized-groups-roma-youth-participation)

When exploring the relationship between the Austrian Youth Council and the European Youth Forum, it was revealed that it is very valuable for them to be a member of such a platform mainly because of the exchange with so many youth councils and other youth organizations from all over Europe, however, within the YFJ the Austrian Youth Council have not initiated any motions or specific initiatives so far.

Despite the fact that the Austrian NYC representatives self-assessed themselves as quite complex in admitting new members (six on a scale from 1 to 10), among all the respondents only in Austria there is no membership fee for the NYCs members (or if there is, it is subsidised by the government).

There are a number of criteria for organizations to become a member of the NYC such as being a children or youth organization, having a focus on youth work, commitment to democratic values, peace, human rights, rule of law, etc., having a minimum of 3000 members, and being active in at least five federal states. While the Council does not have a diversity and inclusion strategy, in Austria, all six national minorities are represented in the NYC, with ethnic minority groups becoming automatically members of the Austrian National Youth Council, and they are not required to pay membership fees. The NYCs of Austria expressed that Roma youth are a topic of their work, yet only to a certain extent. The NYC also targets Roma organizations that are outside of their membership within the EU Youth Dialogue but also with regard to other opportunities.

Similarly, to other representatives of ethnic minorities in Austria, the Roma members of the youth council have not been very active in the last few years. A few years ago, a representative of Roma youth from the Board of Romano Centro was also elected as a NYC board member. Being an active, motivated member, it brought a significant contribution to Roma youth issues and topics. The Roma organizations members of the youth Council have the opportunity to participate in the general assembly, to join specific working groups, run for positions, yet it is a matter of interest from the member organizations.

The Austrian NYC is implementing the European Youth Dialogue, and they were doing a lot of outreach work and were trying to recruit other organizations that are not NYC members. In this sense, the NYC contacted the student organization of Roma in Austria, and invited them to contribute to research, join some workshops, EYD consultations and for the youth conference that the NYC organised in Austria; however, the NYC was not successful in its outreach. The youth council was also put in contact by a ministerial representative with Romano Centro but again, no specific joint work so far.

When asked about specific activities or projects that the National Youth Council has done on Roma youth specifically, it was stated that there is no work done in this area, and this is mainly due to the fact the council does not feel prepared to do a Roma youth

specific project without having a strong Roma youth representation or collaborations with Roma structures.

The key obstacles for strengthening Roma youth representation in the council is mainly related to the lack of a stronger outreach and Roma youth activity in the NYC, despite the fact that Roma youth organisations automatically become members of the NYC. In addition, the Austrian NYC stated that it does not have strong networks with Roma organisations in Austria, which is, to a certain extent, due to the fact that Roma youth structures are not so visible in the country.

## SPAIN

The National Youth Council of Spain (CJE) is a platform of youth entities, created in 1983 and formed by the Youth Councils of the Autonomous Communities and youth organizations at the state level. It is composed of 15 regional youth councils, with around 1100+ regional youth associations, and 47 full member associations, 19 observer associations and around 30+ agreements of participation with national associations.

It has a designated structure to deal with recruitment and reach out. There is a full-time person in charge of recruitment and working to support new associations. The membership requirements differ. For example, for Roma organizations, it is a requirement that they are part of 3 regional youth councils and have at least 250 members in order to be an observer, and 500 members to be a full member.

The Spanish NYC has a strategic plan which includes a diversity and inclusion thematic focus: "For example, there are specific provisions related to inclusion in our trainings, advocacy work, events or representation events, to include specific sectors of the youth that they are normally not represented" stated Xabier Triana Gomez, the Spanish NYC representative.

In Spain, the NYC has had two Roma/pro-Roma organizations members which have youth departments but are not youth organizations per se – Union Romani and Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG). The Romani Union became a member of the youth council in 2014, whereas FSG became a full member in 2020. Also in the regional youth councils CJE has about five different Roma youth associations. Spain is one of the few countries that has an inclusion programme of membership payment where associations that can't afford to pay their contributions are exempted. For example, FSG, the federation that represents the Roma youth in the council pays about 361 euros as membership fee. Xabier Triana Gomez, the Spanish NYC representative claimed that if there was no Roma organization present in the CJE, there would have been no focus on Roma youth in the CJE: "We would have never cared about the Roma population in Spain. If they were not attending the assemblies or not involved in the diversity and inclusion strategy to



remind us to include the Roma, we would have missed groups from the society". This stance reinforces that Roma youth presence is paramount both for raising awareness about the situation of Roma youth but also to make sure Roma youth are present in key youth policy documents.

Since the Roma Youth Federation of Spain has been a member of the Spanish NYC since 1994 it has been really active and always tries to sectorize and have the inclusion of Roma people in every type of policy and action. Since the last national Roma inclusion plan, Roma youth are a specific topic of work: the Spanish NYC promotes the participation of Roma youth not only in the Roma youth federation but also in other youth organizations. For example, scouts in Spain, part of the NYC, have a specific program to support Roma scouts' groups.

With regard to participation, as a way to enhance diversity and inclusion, a positive practice, encountered only in Spain among the surveyed countries, is that vulnerable collectives such as LGBTIQ+, rural youth, Roma, youth with disability, etc., have a specific percentage of quota participation to promote their participation in any activity.

When it comes to specific policies targeting youth, a good practice presented by CJE was the involved FSG in the coordination of the EU Youth Dialogue<sup>36</sup> as a member of the national working group. Through this a series of consultations with young Roma took place all across Spain, by involving the so-called Spanish youth embassies (trained young people to do EU Youth Dialogue consultations) and involving six young Roma to run such consultations with about 160 Roma youth about their opinions are that they are taken into account when defining the EU's youth policies.

One of the key obstacles for Roma youth participation, as expressed in the survey, is discrimination and the perception of the non-Roma population, which is strongly related to the lack of education opportunities and the exclusion from the education system.

The Spanish NYC representatives proposed two main priorities in this respect: NYCs to be more open to do advocacy for Roma youth and include them in this advocacy work. NYCs should also support the creation of strong Roma youth organizations and federations and integrate them into the NYCs: "if Roma youth organizations do not have the capacity [NYCs] should think What we can do for you?, maybe you need support to reach out to more young Roma people, maybe you need a training on how to participate, about how to write a budget, write a project or anything like that" stated Xabier Triana Gomez, the Spanish NYC representative.

## SLOVAKIA

The Slovak Youth Council is made up of 26 member organizations that work with youth, but minorities, including the Roma have never been well represented in its structure or member organizations. The Slovakian NYC is predominantly looking for members that could use a representing body on behalf of multiple organisations in order to be able to have a stronger voice towards the authorities and policymakers. An applying organization has to have at least 100 members or provide services to young people and respect the statutes of the youth council. It also needs to become an observer member for the first year and their membership status is voted in during the general assembly which takes place once a year. The Slovakian NYC is among the least complex with regard to the procedures for becoming a member of the NYC, yet it has a maximum membership fee of 150 euro.

Youth organizations are often perceived as exclusive environments and their members tend to be youth from the majority population. There are for example some Roma scout centers, but mixed youth groups are not common in Slovakia. The Slovak NYC had involved Roma youth in their activities, but had not considered specific strategies to reach them or to adjust working methods to welcome more Roma children and youth and to adapt to what they need. In this sense, in the last few years, through the Stronger Roots Program the NYC put an emphasis on analysing Roma youth needs or perspectives.<sup>37</sup> With Stronger Roots, the NYC was able to open up the topic of including Roma in member organisations' activities and the NYC structure, which is important to its strategic goal of broadening its membership base and becoming a truly inclusive umbrella organisation for youth organisations. By directly involving Roma youth organizations, the NYC became more aware of how youth policy could help bring about change and to take a long-term view of inclusion of Roma in youth work organisations. As a result of meeting and talking with Roma youth about their priorities, the Slovak NYC took steps to bring Roma youth into its decision-making processes and ensure that Roma youth issues are well articulated in both Roma and non-Roma policies. Another big step was that the Roma youth saw that participation can be real, not just something written on paper, and that there is genuine interest in their lived experiences.

The Slovak NYC has two Roma youth organizations: Občianske združenie Ďakujem-Palíkerav and Združenie Mladých Rómov (Association of Young Roma).

In 2019, NYC member Association of Christian Youth Communities (ZKSM) presented in a manual for supporting the inclusion of Roma youth from socially excluded communities, which includes the basic principles that work with youth in socially excluded communities as well as several positive experiences from working

<sup>36</sup> See more [Get involved | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](https://european-youth-portal.europa.eu)

<sup>37</sup> [Collaboration of Stakeholders \(glopolis.org\)](https://glopolis.org)

in this area.<sup>38</sup> In 2020, the Slovak NYC had a project called "Towards Inclusive Youth Work" dedicated to developing a methodology for inclusive youth work, focusing on Roma youth. In addition to the Roma members of the NYC, the project also brought together other organizations that work with excluded Roma youth such as Divé maky, Platform Our Education, Association of Young Roma, M. Šimečka Foundation and CVEK. In addition to specific publications and projects, the Slovak NYC also promotes Roma youth organizations through their communications. In 2021, it published an interview with the newly established young Roma association from Slovakia Divé maky.<sup>39</sup>

Speaking with various youth work organisations to learn why it is so difficult to include Roma children in their activities, the Slovak NYC revealed that the biggest obstacle is that these organisations lack strategies for reaching out to Roma youth. Youth leaders and workers often want young Roma to participate in leisure activities for example, but just don't know how to motivate them to join or they are afraid and insecure because they have not worked with them before. Some of the key obstacles for Roma youth participation, as expressed in the survey, are diverse and range from the general negative prejudice towards Roma people in Slovakia to the unreachability of Roma youth towards the venues of specific activities.

## UK

Established in 1948, the British Youth Council is the National Youth Council of the UK. It aims to empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. "We support young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders."<sup>40</sup>

The Council is one of the few in our survey to have a diversity and inclusion strategy and its representatives explicitly stated that when it comes to recruitment for new members they are doing some mapping in order to identify whose voices aren't being heard.

For the British Youth Council, the organizations applying for membership need to be legally constituted, to work with or advocate for young people, and agree to align with our values and equal opportunities policy. The procedures for becoming a member are not complex (three out of ten complexity level), and it has a membership fee, yet it varies based on the number of young people represented by the organization.

The Council has 180 members out of which one is Roma: the Traveller Movement. The Traveller Movement has a rather strong youth department within the organization

and has project that deal with overcoming barriers for young Roma and travellers in education and employment, but also to reach out to, and encourage partnership work across UK, to firm up the infrastructure that helps support and develop pathways into how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people were engaging with sector specific and mainstream youth organisations.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this, when asked whether Roma youth are a topic of work for the council, it was stated the following: "We identified that Roma youth weren't part of our network - beyond that we do not have a specific strand of work". In addition, the council does not have any specific project, activity or policy regarding the participation of Roma young people.

Some of the key obstacles for Roma youth participation as expressed in the survey, are related to access and the extent to which Roma youth are networked into "mainstream" services and information; funding and the inability of young Roma and traveller people to attend events organized by the council, but also the inability of the council to support them financially.

## Ireland

The NYC of Ireland is the national representative body for voluntary youth organisations. Currently they have 56 member organisations working with over 380,000 young people. Membership is open to voluntary, not for profit or non-governmental organisations or agencies that have an interest in the youth sector in Ireland "whose work involves delivering youth work services to young people under 25 or are advocating on behalf of young people and that agree with NYCI's vision where all young people are empowered to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to realise their potential and to actively participate in an inclusive society that values and respects them."<sup>42</sup>

The National Youth Council of Ireland is one of the quite complex ones from a procedural point of view for new members admission, and it has quite high membership fees ranging from €500 per annum up to €2500 relative to the income of the organisation. Yet, it has a diversity and inclusion strategy, and it invites groups to apply for NYC membership and at the same time it supports them in building their capacity and building trust among themselves. The Irish National Youth Council requires that the organization works with young people on a specific program of work (youth groups) or advocacy (e.g., youth political parties, Union of students, etc.).

In Ireland, three of the 56 members of the NYC represent Roma young people. The NYC in Ireland is intentional and proactive in involving Roma and Traveller youth in their activities: "We include Roma in all our inclusion work wherever possible. We work a lot

38 [ZKSM presented in Čičava a manual to support the inclusion of Roma youth | mládež.sk \(mladez.sk\)](#)

39 [Civic association Divé maky: Education of a new generation of Roma — Youth Council of Slovakia \(RmS\) \(mladez.sk\)](#)

40 [British Youth Council | About Us \(byc.org.uk\)](#)

41 [Reaching-Out-Flyer.pdf \(travellermovement.org.uk\)](#)

42 [Members - National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

with Travellers and Traveller organisations. We have two Traveller organisations in our membership and one other Roma and Traveller organisation is applying."

The first organization is the National Association of Travellers' Centres which is the largest provider of Youth Services to young Travellers in Ireland and works from a community development and partnership approach. It recognises the equality of the Traveller community by providing programmes, initiatives and services that promote the participation and inclusion of the Traveller community in Irish Society.

The second organization is the Irish Traveller Movement, which works collectively to represent the views of Travellers and to develop policies, actions, and innovative programmes to bring about change for Travellers in Ireland. In 2019, the Young Travellers Forum was established to bring young Travellers together to facilitate dialogue, meaningful participation, empowerment, and leadership.

In addition, there is an Equality and Intercultural Programme that seeks to work with Roma and to support youth organizations to work with Roma young people. There are no Roma-specific youth organizations yet there are some Roma-specific groups within the wider membership (i.e., within large youth organizations and as such cannot apply for separate membership of NYCI). In addition, the NYC works with Roma youth leaders and makes a special effort to include Roma youth in their youth consultations. As of 2023, the NYC is working on a chapter for its Diversity Toolkit on working with Roma young people.

The key obstacles for Roma youth participation are double sided: on the one hand from the Roma community itself there are ongoing processes of trust building and relationships. The NYC representative also stated that it is getting parental, and particularly paternal support for young people to get involved in youth work. On the other hand, there is a need to build youth workers' understanding of Roma culture.

#### NYCS WITH NO ROMA YOUTH MEMBERS AND WORK ON ROMA YOUTH BUT WITH AN INTEREST ON FOCUSING ON ROMA YOUTH

In addition to those NYCs that have Roma youth as members and are also working on Roma youth, a second category is represented by those NYCs with no Roma youth members but with sporadic Roma youth individuals as part of their structures, and with some interest in focusing more on Roma youth. These NYCs are present in Serbia, Slovenia, Latvia, Bulgaria, but also in Romania and Moldova (the latter three have been approached for an interview on the issue but did not respond to our invitation).

For the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), any youth-led and youth-oriented organization or association of organizations from the territory of the Republic of Serbia can become associated or full members of KOMS if the organization is registered in the

Register of Associations maintained by the Serbian Business Registers Agency for at least two years to an associate member and four years for full membership. Interestingly enough, one of the criteria is that the organization is organized in accordance with democratic principles and does not promote any form of discrimination, intolerance or violence. It is also required that the organization carries out youth activities in at least two local self-government units and has been programmatically determined to work with young people and that young people are actively involved in the work of the organization (statement about the participation of young people in the Board of Directors or in other bodies of the organization, or in the implementation of projects and/or in other important activities of the organization).

The National Youth Council of Serbia reaches out to potential new members by promoting the benefits of membership among them and by paying special attention to youth organizations from remote communities.

The NYCs of Serbia expressed that Roma youth are a topic of their work only to a certain extent: "Promotion and respect of youth rights is one of three programmatic areas of our NYC. Also, inclusion and work with youth from minority groups including Roma youth is a horizontal topic and one of the core values of our work" (NYC of Serbia).

Specific obstacles are related to the lack of resources and personnel within Roma organisations to take active participation in KOMS activities or policy and advocacy efforts.

The National Youth Forum of Bulgaria is the largest youth platform in Bulgaria, which brings together 28 youth organizations from across the country. It presents itself as an active partner of national and European institutions in building and advocating for youth policies. Accordingly, its mission is to represent the interests of young people in Bulgaria and their needs, highlighting the importance and importance of youth organizations, their development and participation in social and socio-political processes, and to provide effective structured dialogue through cooperation with relevant stakeholders and decision makers in youth policy.<sup>43</sup> The activities organized are mainly focused on active citizenship or related to informing young people, training aimed at creating key competences for participation in civic life as well as events providing space for dialogue between young people and different stakeholders. The council is the chair of the National Working Group on Structured Dialogue (EU Dialogue on Youth) and as such coordinates the implementation of activities at national level since 2014.

The Council does not have a diversity and inclusion strategy. The National Youth Forum of Bulgaria does not have a Roma youth organization in its membership, nor are Roma youth a strategic priority: "all our strategic priorities and areas of action are

<sup>43</sup> [NATIONAL YOUTH FORUM BULGARIA | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#)



focused on youth as a whole and not precisely on particular groups. Nevertheless, some of our topics are connected with issues that are closer to Roma youth than other groups." was reported in the survey.

On a scale from 1- not complex to 10- very complex, the NYC representative positioned themselves on a scale of 4 with regards to the procedural complexity for new organizations becoming a member. It has a membership fee, which varies depending on the type of membership - it is between 107 and 164 EUR yearly for full-right members and 61 EUR yearly for associated members.

When it comes to recruitment, it recruits new members twice a year during their General Assemblies. "We have social media posts 1-2 months before each General Assembly and a special section for membership on our website with detailed information. Organizations either reach out to us or we reach out to them" - as they stated. In addition, board members and Secretariat have meetings with potential member organizations during which the membership criteria and procedure are discussed alongside expectations, opportunities and following communication.

According to our survey respondent, for full membership in the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria can apply:

- (1) branches of international youth organizations that have branches or member organizations in at least eight countries recognized by the United Nations,
- (2) national youth organizations that have branches or member organizations in a minimum of three administrative-territorial areas, have more than one hundred (100) individual members; have more than thirty (30) members in each branch or member organization,
- (3) youth political party, youth political association or youth structure of a political party and/or coalition represented in the Bulgarian and/or European Parliament,
- (4) local youth organization with more than one hundred (100) youth members and an annual budget of more than 2,555 Euro,
- (4) an individual authorized to represent at least three youth organizations to the National Youth Forum, and
- (5) student councils in Bulgarian higher education institutions according to art. 72 of the Higher Education Act.

To sum up, such criteria for membership represent a key barrier for Roma and Roma youth organizations from Bulgaria to become full members of the NYC. Bulgaria is one of the EU countries with a significant Roma population, especially Roma youth. Failing to include the diversity of Bulgarian youth in the Council, including the Roma misses the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity for all young people, especially keeping in mind that discrimination against Roma is among the highest in the EU (FRA Roma Survey). Research has shown that diverse collectives exhibit reduced racial bias and stereotypes,

improved leadership, problem-solving, and complex thinking skills.

The National Youth Council of Slovenia - MSS, is also lacking Roma youth organizations as members, and also a diversity and inclusion strategy. Roma youth are not a topic of the Council's work as a topic of work, however, in the past it had some projects on topics such as inclusive and diverse societies, therefore the topic of Roma youth was brought up, but there was no special elaboration or further work. The council does not have any specific project, activity, or policy regarding the participation of Roma young people.

The Council has 13 youth organizations as part of their membership. Here, only youth organizations, as defined by the law governing the youth sector, can join the council. The Council has a membership fee of 210€ for full-members per year. The procedures for becoming a member are not so complex (five out of ten complexity level).

An organization wishing to become a member of the MSS must submit a complete application for admission to membership at least 30 days before the day of the meeting of the MSS Assembly. The application for full membership must contain proof of the status of a national youth organization, as determined by the law, a list of local branches of the organization, and a written statement that the organization accepts and will respect the Statute and other acts of the MSS.

As obstacles for equal participation of Roma young people in youth and Roma policy measures and programs in your country, the MSS representative stated in the survey that there is general lack of interest of Roma youth to actively participate in the society.

The National Youth Council of Latvia (LJP) has 51 member organizations. The Council does not have a diversity and inclusion strategy, does not have a Roma youth organization in their membership, nor are Roma youth a strategic priority or an area of action. On a scale from 1- not complex to 10- very complex, the NYC representative positioned themselves on the scale a two with regards to the procedural complexity for new organizations becoming a member. The annual membership fee is 30 EUR for full members, and 20 EUR for associated members.

The Latvian Youth Council representative stated that they engaged in a thorough social media advertising when it comes to recruitment, yet they personally know some members of youth organizations, who are not members of the NYC and they choose to approach them directly.

For acquiring the associated member status, the only requirement is being a legal entity. To become a full member, youth organizations need to be an associated member for a year, be a legal entity for three years and have two thirds of its members younger than 30 years old.

One of the key obstacles for Roma youth participation and NYC membership in Latvia, as expressed in the survey, is the lack of Roma youth organisations (although there are, for example, Roma cultural organisations and Roma women organisations). In addition, it was stated that, "many young Roma people come from poverty and socially isolated families. There is still strong stigma and racial stereotypes about Roma people, which are contributing to this problem. Many young Roma people have the same participation problems as other young people from socioeconomically low backgrounds. However this background is affected by previously mentioned stereotypes."

To sum up, NYCs are important structures of youth representation and participation at the national level, especially when it comes to youth policy and work. Many times they have a consultative role in the discussion and definition of youth policies. They have the right to formulate opinions and recommendations on youth issues directed to policy-making bodies at all levels of government. Roma youth are missing from such discussions, and the clear indicator is that EU level youth policy measures fail to address the unique challenges faced by Roma youth. Roma youth participation and representation is often minimal or non-existent in NYCs, as the NYCs lack proactive measures and intentional goals to include Roma substantively. For example, in Romania, Bulgaria or Moldova, countries with a relatively large Roma minority, the NYCs do not have a representative of the Roma youth NGOs in their composition. The inability or the difficulty of NYCs to include Roma youth is also a result of the lack of openness towards Roma youth, but there is also the relatively weak Roma youth civil society sector and its presence and visibility at the national, regional or European level. The NYCs with Roma members and Roma youth focus stand as good examples and efforts for Roma youth to be more included, get more involved, and help make society fairer and more together in Europe.

## VI. ROMA YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND STRUCTURES

According to Phiren Amenca research (2020), the number of Roma youth-led structures is slowly increasing, and Roma youth are gaining visibility within the broader youth and Roma civil society sector. The NGOs included in the 2020 study reported that Roma youth NGOs or NGOs working on Roma youth have low capacities (i.e., staff, financial and human resources). This has a direct influence on the number of projects these organisations can implement, the number of Roma youth affiliated with their NGO, their overall outreach capacity and, to a certain extent, their partnerships or membership in NYCs or INGYOs. The study revealed that while some of the NGOs might have the capacity to deal with Roma issues more generally (i.e., education or culture), they have limited or no capacity to serve and empower Roma youth and women and to address their issues (i.e., lack of knowledge, human and financial resources). This greatly influences their ability to be part of mainstream youth structures and to participate on an equal basis and represent Roma youth interests and voices.

The survey dedicated to Roma youth NGOs has been answered by the following NGOs:

- EDUMA, Slovakia
- Divé maky, o. z., Slovakia
- Bud' slyšet - Be Heard Initiative, Czechia
- Center Amalipe, Bulgaria
- FAGiC, Spain
- Nevo Parudimos, Romania
- Roma Versitas, Albania
- Local Youth Council of Shuto Orizari, North Macedonia
- Roma Democratic Development Association Sonce, North Macedonia
- Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalítico, North Macedonia

In terms of their profile, three NGOs were structures exclusively dedicated to Roma youth, six are NGOs that have a broader scope but include a youth section dedicated to Roma youth and one local Roma youth council. There were no structures representing Roma youth political and social movements.

In terms of their human resources and capacity, the surveyed youth structures have between 6 and 150 staff and volunteers. For example, the Local Youth Council of Shuto Orizari has six volunteers and no projects just voluntary youth initiatives; EDUMA 5 staff members and six external lecturers and it is currently involved in three projects; Divé maky has 30 staff members and volunteers and six projects. In the RDDA Sonce organization, there are five employees, four short term workers and 50 volunteers

involved in four projects, out of which three projects are currently being implemented, while one has been approved as of 2023. The Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalítico has 16 staff members and four projects in implementation. Last, but not least Roma Versitas Albania has about 150 staff members and volunteers and four projects in implementation.

Out of the total number of Roma youth structures surveyed, eight of them are part of international or EU level youth structures or networks. Examples include: FAGiC, a member of Phiren Amenca, ERGO Network and also FARE network. The RDDA Sonce is a member in several structures: the local youth council in the municipality of Tetovo (N. Macedonia), called Network for the representation of Roma rights; the National Coordinating Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Roma Strategy 2014-2020; the national coordinating body for monitoring non-discrimination situations and the implementation of laws, by-laws and strategic documents, and lastly a member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (see ) and United Against Racism. In Bulgaria, Center Amalipe is the largest Roma organisation in Bulgaria working on education and community development and is a member of the Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby. Nevo Parudimos from Romania, is a member of Phiren Amenca, ternYpe, Youth Express Network, YES Forum and ERGO Network. The remaining respondents claimed that they did not try to engage with international EU level youth NGOs since the main focus of their organisation is on the national level. However, taking into consideration the general context and focus on youth, in the upcoming period they might consider creating an umbrella of youth Roma NGOs in order to influence the youth policies.

The institution of the National Youth Council is quite known among the Roma youth structures surveyed, with all of them stating that they have heard about their national NYC. When asked whether the National Youth Council from their countries focuses on Roma youth (i.e., through activities, projects, consultations, voicing Roma youth concerns) the responses show that NYCs's work on Roma youth is not known or visible. In Slovakia, one of the NGOs stated that they are not much aware about this type of work, and the other one stated that the NYC tries to include the voices of Roma youth once in a while. In Romania, despite the different platforms and forums bringing together NYC representatives and Roma youth civil society, there is no Roma youth membership. In Bulgaria, Amalipe, one of the most known Roma organizations working with young people, has not been approached by the youth council and none of Amalipe's beneficiaries was part of the council. In Spain, FAGiC stated that in their view the Spanish NYC does not focus on Roma youth whereas in Albania, the work of the NYC on Roma youth is partially visible.

In Czechia, the representative of the Bud' slyšet - Be Heard Initiative (an informal group which focuses on increasing civic engagement among Roma youth), who is also a former Roma youth representative in the youth council at the local level, stated that there were several Roma youth part of the national council who had a significant position. In addition, the National Youth Council - Česká Rada Děti a Mládeže (ČRDM) also has a Roma organization as member.<sup>44</sup> The Czech Council of Children and Youth (ČRDM) was established in July 1998 by eight organisations of children and youth. Today it is composed of 100 member organisations with around 200 000 individual members – the organisations range from very small to the biggest ones; nine regional youth councils are members of ČRDM as well.<sup>45</sup> The requirements for new members are rather simple: only organisations that are regular legal entities, i.e. registered in the official register, can apply for membership in the Czech Council of Children and Youth; Newly established organizations can also apply for membership. The organization must have work with children and youth or for children and youth enshrined in its statutes (founding charter, etc.).<sup>46</sup>

The Roma youth representative from Czechia stated that one of the key barriers for Roma youth participation in the council is related to the existing stereotypes towards Roma people, especially Roma youth, but also the fact that it is not so well known among Roma youth what the national youth council does and how they can get involved, but also from the NYC's side there is a need to also focus more on Roma youth and try to approach other minorities, including the Roma differently and become more inclusive. The youth representatives stated that it is not difficult from a bureaucratic point of view to join the council yet a key barrier is for potential organisations to see the advantage of becoming a member of the Council.

In North Macedonia, the Roma youth structures surveyed stated that the NYC is not so much dedicated to Roma youth: "The National Youth Council in our country has activities where all young people are mentioned in general, including Roma, but they are not focusing on activities for Roma." In their view the North Macedonian NYC includes Roma youth wherever it can as a target group.

Out of the total number of respondents only one of them is part of a National Youth Councils: the RDDA Sonce is part of the National Youth Council in North Macedonia. Joining the NYC they hoped that through such a structure they would significantly influence policies targeting Roma youth. The other youth structures from N. Macedonia claimed that they would like to be more involved but have not thought thoroughly about joining the NYC, even though the NYC did show interest in having a Roma member in

44 [List of members | ČRDM \(en\) - Czech Council of Children and Youth \(crdm.cz\)](#)

45 [ČRDM \(en\) - Czech Council of Children and Youth \(crdm.cz\)](#)

46 [How to become a member of CRDM | CRDM - Czech Council of Children and Youth](#)



Council. One of the key difficulties is that the procedure for preparing the necessary documentation is sometimes bureaucratic and time consuming. Another barrier is the fact that the National Youth Council expressed no explicit stand on the need for minority representation and diversity in NYC.

In Albania, the RomaVersitas representative stated that they are not part of the Albanian NYC, however they are questioning the independence of the NYC as most of the time is under political influence. What would help them to become a member would be a just, clear, fair representation process and a reserved place for a Roma organisation to represent Roma youth.

In Slovakia, the surveyed youth structures claimed that they had considered joining the National Youth Council however, due to certain fees (i.e., membership fees) and the lack of staff, they ultimately decided not to participate. According to the Slovakian Roma youth structures, what would help and motivate them to become members of the NYC would be the possibility to join without paying fees and have a designated person from the NYC to support their organisation.

In Spain, FAGiC claimed that: "We were thinking at some point, but in order to have an impact, the structure of the National Youth Council should change, and the Roma youth organizations need more support in the youth area". The key challenges in becoming a member of the Spanish NYC are related to the membership fees, the procedures for becoming a member, but also the existing structural discrimination that exists among mainstream youth structures. According to FAGiC, more Roma youth presence in the NYC would require sustainable resources for youth representation, work and policy, especially when it comes to Roma youth, and a move away from dependency on small projects and funding.

In Romania, Nevo Parudimos Association is focusing mainly on youth projects, but it has worked on lobbying and advocacy at the national and international levels on diverse Rom atopics. Between 2016 and 2019, the Nevo Parudimos Association together with the Roma Education Fund, the Civic Union of Young Roma from Romania, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, organized the Romanian Roma Youth Forums.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of these forums was to increase the number of young Roma involved in Romanian civil society, but also to contribute to the development of new partnerships between civil society, public institutions and Roma or young Roma youth organizations; increasing the knowledge of young Roma about the civil society of youth in Romania developing an (informal) network of young Roma to be active. In Romania, a country with a large Roma minority, the NYC does not have a representative of the Roma youth NGOs in their componse, as reflected on their website. The NYC has members which are

operating at the national and county level - about 25 members with a federative statute, and in Romania, there is no such Roma youth structure, yet their members might have Roma youth NGOs or Roma youth members.

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Romanian Roma Youth Platform<sup>48</sup> took place as part of the Roma Youth Voices project of Phiren Amenca implemented in Romania in partnership with the E-romnja association. At this event, Mr. Gabriel Carnariu, the President of the Romanian Youth Council, stated that Roma youth should have a place in the development of national Roma and youth strategies, yet through their representatives,<sup>49</sup> pointing out that in order to become a member minority or Roma youth NGOs need to have offices in at least 5 counties.<sup>50</sup> The NYC has a focus on vulnerable communities and in 2020 it released the resolution of Romanian youth 2020-2027<sup>51</sup>, which is in line with the EU vision for youth. It includes 11 objectives on youth – with objective three making reference to inclusive societies that tackle different categories of disadvantaged youth. Despite this, the resolution does not mention Roma as a specific target group.

In Bulgaria, Center Amalipe is the largest Roma organisation in Bulgaria working with young people towards better education, community development and equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society. The Amalipe representative stated that they are not aware of any Roma youth present in the NYC in Bulgaria, and that they have not heard about any Roma youth specific activities, or projects. In addition, it was stated that the NYC has never approached Amalipe even though they are quite visible and known at the national and at the European level. In her opinion, NYC is a rather elitist structure, of the most privileged youth, from elite schools and big cities. Amalipe representative finds it very relevant to develop common work with the Bulgarian Youth Council, especially since it is part of an informal network on vulnerable youth and children from 300 schools in Bulgaria: "We are now organizing our annual leadership academy where we plan to have 150 students from 7th to 12th grade whom we want to train to work in groups, how be leaders, how to manage problems, like hate speech, discrimination, or how to be active people" stated Amalipe representative. In their view, a joint work with the Bulgarian NYC on these groups of youngsters would be beneficial for their school continuation but also for ensuring their voices are included in the work of the council.

When asked what are some of the main obstacles to equal participation of Roma young people in youth and Roma policy making and/or in policy consultation mechanisms in their country, the participating NGOs listed the following barriers:

48 See more at: <https://phirenamenca.eu/romanian-roma-youth-platform/>

49 As stated in his speech on November 24th, 2020, on the occasion of the Romanian Roma Youth Platform. Available video at: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=379892133258447](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=379892133258447)

50 Aderă la CTRI – Consiliul Tineretului din România

51 The Romanian National Youth Council. (2020). The Romanian Youth Resolution. <https://ctr.ro/rezolutia-tinerilor-2020-2027-viitorul-incepe-astazi/>

47 See more at: <http://uctrr.ro/forumul-tinerilor-romi-din-romania-2016/>

- the overall discrimination and exclusion of Roma youth, particularly the existing structural antigypsyism in European societies
- many Roma youth do not have the necessary self-esteem for an active engagement
- a lack of accessible information coming towards Roma youth
- Roma youth do not have an equal access to the resources available for youth
- Roma youth lack the knowledge about how they can get involved in the policy-making process
- there is little or no space for Roma youth in organisations that are working on youth issues
- youth representation structures do not provide a space for Roma youth to participate in the decision making processes and they do not share know-how with other Roma youth NGOs
- Roma youth have fewer opportunities to participate in their schools, universities and social environment
- no political will to include Roma youth when designing and deciding upon Roma or youth policies
- there are structural barriers impeding Roma youth to become politically active, and therefore gain the necessary power to act on behalf of Roma youth or Roma in general

## CONCLUSIONS

Out of the total number of National Youth Councils (NYCs) members of the European Youth Forum contacted, only 11 have responded to Phiren Amenca's invitation to take part in the research. Only seven have Roma youth organisations as their members, and four of them have Roma youth as an explicit focus of their work. This shows that NYCs's self-selection to take part in this research is given by their interest in Roma youth issues and the extent to which they have Roma youth organizations as their members or have specific activities, projects and policies targeting Roma youth. The research reveals that national youth councils are lacking proactive measures and intentional goals to include Roma youth substantively. Out of the six Roma youth organizations surveyed only one of them is part of a National Youth Council.

There is well-documented evidence of the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity for all young people. In addition, a number of key documents regarding youth policies emphasise the crucial importance of inclusion, diversity and non-discrimination. Diverse youth collectives and structures exhibit reduced racial bias and stereotypes, improved leadership, problem-solving, and complex thinking skills.

For example, the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027<sup>52</sup> considers inclusion and diversity as its main guiding principles. The Erasmus Plus and European Solidarity Corps Programs of the European Union have an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy where they pay special attention to the issue of including young people who face multiple economic, social, cultural, and other barriers<sup>53</sup>. In its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2018)<sup>54</sup>, the European Youth Forum clearly guides its members with concrete examples of how to improve their work towards achieving better inclusion and diversity. The European Youth Forum, in its Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines states that "inclusive youth organisations eventually lead to an inclusive society" and that youth organisations must reflect on the diversity of needs, interests and challenges young people find themselves in. In addition, the YFJ, through its structures and actions, aims to take the responsibility to stand for the diverse circumstances of young people and their uniqueness, to advocate for ending discrimination against young people based on different premises and to fight for more inclusion and diversity.

Despite all guidance, the majority of international organisations and national youth councils - many members of the European Youth Forum do not have developed strategies and policies that seek to make this inclusion and diversity a reality, thus failing to represent all youth voices. Only three NYCs declared that they have a diversity and inclusion strategy: the British Youth Council, the National Youth Council of Spain, and the Irish National Youth Council. NYCs have employed diverse strategies to be more inclusive towards underrepresented groups. For example, subsidised or no NYC membership fees for those associations that cannot afford to pay it (i.e., Austria, Spain) or recruitment strategies and outreach that focuses specifically on those youth groups that are difficult to reach out.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) has a full membership of 41 international non-governmental youth organisations; however only six responded to our research invitation, and only two of them have Roma youth members. Due to structural inequalities and discrimination, the European youth scene lacks a strong presence of Roma youth in international youth organizations. Our findings show that Roma youth presence in such structures is still restricted, however the profile of the INGYOs and the key issues they focus on (i.e., minorities) increase the likelihood to have Roma youth members of Roma youth related activities or projects in such INGYOs. The findings also show that even those INGYOs that have a profile that is highly relevant for Roma youth - such as education, political participation, discrimination, etc. - do not have a Roma presence.

52 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>

53 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy>

54 <https://www.youthforum.org/files/Diversity20and20inclusion20guidelines.pdf>

This research shows once again that Roma youth are excluded from NYCs and INGYOs, and do not have access to networks and structures of representation. Such mainstream youth institutions do not target Roma youth specifically in their work, and policies and policymakers have yet to address systematically and continuously the needs of Roma youth in Europe. Roma youth representation and presence in these youth power structures need to be enhanced in order for policy-makers to be introduced to specific Roma youth initiatives. By lacking a presence in such structures, Roma youth are excluded from shaping national and European youth initiatives, even though the 12 million Roma in Europe is a young population. On the one hand, the inability or the difficulty for such structures to include Roma youth is a result of the lack of openness of European youth structures towards Roma youth, on the other hand also of the relatively weak Roma youth civil society sector and its presence and visibility at the national, regional or European level. Roma youth can participate in mainstream youth structures if they are represented through youth NGOs, and therefore it is important to support NGOs that aim to support Roma youth representation by promoting Roma youth financing, promoting a legislative framework that facilitates the creation of youth structures, etc.

Participation in national youth councils and other international youth organizations is a valuable opportunity for Roma youth to have their voices heard and contribute to decision-making processes, but also to advocate for their rights, raise awareness about their unique challenges, and contribute to positive change. Building relationships, acquiring skills, and actively engaging in the dialogue are key to effective participation. National youth councils and other international youth organizations can work to ensure greater inclusion and diversity, particularly focusing on the needs and aspirations of Roma youth. This approach promotes equitable representation, social justice, and meaningful participation for all young people, regardless of their background.

Given the crucial position of the European Youth Forum to define the policies that are affecting young people, and, the low presence of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations in these structures, membership should better target Roma youth and how this would contribute to youth policies, too advancing Roma youth position and interests, as well as their participation at the national and international level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

1. Ensure that the post 2023 YFJ Strategic Plan includes stronger priorities on the inclusion of underrepresented, marginalized and vulnerable communities, and that the YFJ supports its members in developing specific measures and policies to respond to the diversity of youth present in their countries.
2. In line with the 2020 YFJ Resolution on Combating Antigypsyism and the Inclusion and Equal Participation of Roma Youth, which resolves to address the participation of young Roma, ensure and support that Roma youth is addressed in both European and national mainstream youth policies, and that the equal participation of Roma youth organizations within the YFJ and its member structures is strengthened.
3. Ensure that the structures of the YFJ follow up on their Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines, and enforce and support all its membership to develop their own diversity and inclusion strategies in the spirit of the European Youth Strategy, with clear implementation and monitoring mechanisms, based on the specific country context and youth needs.
4. The YFJ should encourage both NYCs and international youth NGOs to engage in a stronger outreach to Roma youth organisations and groups, and target them for membership.
5. Members of the European Youth Forum should assess together with Roma youth organisations the key barriers for membership, specifically how membership fees or the lack of established Roma youth structures are a barrier to Roma youth participation.
6. Make use of the available resources and expertise provided by YFJ members which focus on diversity and inclusion, such as Phiren Amenca, when advocating before the European Commission or the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth, developing policy recommendations, developing and delivering youth trainings, research, and others.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUTH NGOS:

1. Engage in Outreach and Awareness:
  - a. Actively reach out to Roma youth organizations and individuals to build relationships and trust.
  - b. Raise awareness about the importance of inclusion and diversity within the organization's leadership and membership.
  - c. Employ different strategies such as reaching out to potential Roma youth organizations, or have a designated structure to deal with recruitment and reach out.
  - d. Educate members about Roma culture, history, and traditions, but also about the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Roma youth.
  - e. Partner with Roma-focused organizations and NGOs to leverage their expertise and resources.
  - f. Engage in joint projects and initiatives that directly benefit Roma youth.
2. Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces:
  - a. Develop and enforce anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies within the organization, including a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
  - b. Foster a safe and welcoming environment where Roma youth feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.
  - c. Ensure that meetings, events, and communication are accessible to all, including those with socio-economic difficulties, diverse linguistic backgrounds or disabilities.
  - d. Ensure that membership fees and procedures are not a major obstacle to achieving inclusion and diversity.
3. Representation in Decision-Making and Targeted Programs:
  - a. Design programs and initiatives that address the specific needs and interests of Roma youth.
  - a. Actively involve Roma youth in leadership roles and decision-making processes within the organization.
  - b. Establish advisory boards or committees that include Roma representatives to provide input and guidance.
  - c. Advocate for policies and legislation that promote the rights and opportunities of Roma youth, particularly in the areas of education, employment, and social inclusion.
  - d. Collaborate with policymakers and government agencies to address systemic discrimination of Roma youth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS:

1. Diverse Representation and Roma Youth Organizations Engagement:
  - a. Actively reach out to Roma organizations in the country to establish meaningful partnerships in order to make NYCs more inclusive and representative.
  - b. Promote and ensure diverse representation within the National Youth Council's leadership and membership.
  - c. Create dedicated seats or positions for Roma youth representatives in the Council to guarantee their active involvement and views in national policy and decision-making processes.
  - d. Encourage and support young Roma individuals to run for leadership roles within the Council.
2. Roma-Specific Programs and Initiatives:
  - a. Provide training and education to Council members and staff on Roma culture, history, and the unique challenges faced by Roma youth.
  - b. Design and implement programs and initiatives that address the specific needs and aspirations of Roma youth.
  - c. Provide mentorship, leadership development, and skills-building programs tailored to the circumstances of Roma youth.
3. Inclusive Policy Advocacy:
  - a. Advocate for policies and programs that address the unique challenges faced by Roma youth, especially in areas such as education, employment, and social inclusion.
  - b. Collaborate with government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to advance the rights and opportunities of Roma youth.
  - c. Include Roma youth in research and data collection, such as when evaluating or designing specific programs for youth (i.e., Youth Progress Index, Erasmus+).
4. Safe and Inclusive Spaces:
  - a. Develop and enforce strong anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies within the Council.
  - b. Ensure that Council meetings, events, and communication are accessible to all, including those with diverse linguistic backgrounds or disabilities.
  - c. Encourage open and respectful dialogue to foster a safe and welcoming environment for all members.
5. Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:
  - a. Regularly assess the progress of inclusion and diversity initiatives within the Council.
  - b. Collect data on the demographic composition of the Council's membership and leadership to ensure inclusivity.
  - c. Seek feedback from Roma youth and other underrepresented groups to make necessary adjustments and improvements.
6. Partnerships with Roma Organizations:
  - a. Collaborate with Roma-focused organizations and NGOs to leverage their expertise and resources in promoting the rights and well-being of Roma youth.
  - b. Work on joint projects and initiatives that directly benefit Roma communities.
  - c. Amplify the voices and concerns of Roma youth by partnering with local and national Roma organizations in advocacy efforts.

Annex 1. Research summary

Aim	Methods	Target	Potential themes/topics	Scope/Aim
What are the barriers of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations for participating in National Youth Councils and International Youth Organizations (within the scope of the YFJ Membership)?	Desk research, surveys, interviews, and case studies	National Youth Councils	Membership and presence of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations in their composition, projects, and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To find out what are the roles, status and composition of the youth councils as defined by the law, whether they are under the direct authority of the ministry in charge of youth policy or other ministries and units, who provide the necessary logistical and budgetary resources.</li> <li>- To identify the causal mechanism when it comes to the presence/absence of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations in their membership.</li> <li>- To present practices of Rom youth inclusion and exclusion in NYCs.</li> </ul>
	Survey	International youth organizations	<p>Opportunities and efforts they have created for Roma youth participation.</p> <p>Identify their perception on challenges and needs of Roma youth and Roma youth NGOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To map their work and build and build a taxonomy of types of engagement they promote with regards to Roma youth</li> <li>- Reflect on the influence Roma youth have on these structures and their policies</li> </ul>
	Survey	Local and national Roma youth organizations	<p>Main issues and concerns</p> <p>Preferences of participation</p> <p>Opportunities for participation</p> <p>Level of participation</p> <p>Obstacles to participation</p> <p>Needs for effective participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To gain a deeper understanding on the perceived barriers of Roma youth NGOs and structures to access mainstream youth networks, coalitions and groups at the international level.</li> <li>- To identify the factors that would enhance Roma youth NGOs participation in NYCs and INGYOs.</li> </ul>

The current study on Roma youth participation in mainstream youth structures was conducted by Dr Simona Torotcoi, independent researcher, for the Phiren Amenca International Network as part of the [Youth Against Antigypsyism - YAG project](#).

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