19th European Platform for Roma Inclusion

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Participation in Education and Employment

Organised by the European Commission and the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Clontarf Castle Hotel, Dublin, 5 November 2026

Final Report

Introduction

The 19th European Platform for Roma Inclusion took place in Dublin on 5 November 2026, International Romani Language Day, a few days after the Commission published its report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks.[1] It was jointly organised by the European Commission and the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and brought together around 230 participants, including representatives of governments of EU Member States and enlargement countries, National Roma Contact Points, EU institutions, international organisations, equality bodies, local authorities, academia, and Roma, Traveller and pro-Roma civil society.

Under the theme *Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Participation in Education and Employment*, the Platform took stock of progress in two areas that are central to the EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020–2030. The meeting combined testimonies of lived experience, a political panel, table discussions involving all participants and a panel on funding and next steps.

The event opened with the Romani anthem *Gelem, Gelem* and was moderated by Mr Michael Donnelly.

Opening remarks

Mr Jerry Buttimer TD, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland, welcomed participants on behalf of the Irish Government and of Ms Norma Foley TD, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality. Recalling the Presidency's motto "Strength with Unity", he stressed that advancing Roma and Traveller equality is not only a matter of fairness but also makes societies stronger, more resilient and more equitable. Drawing on his experience as a teacher, he described education as a gateway to equality and employment as a source of dignity, belonging and independence. He called for a people-centred, bottom-up approach based on the principle "Nothing about us without us" and invited participants to identify not only structural barriers but also what works, so that policymakers can act on concrete solutions.

In a video message, **Ms Hadja Lahbib**, European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, underlined that Roma inclusion cannot be decided for Roma but must be built with Roma. Referring to the EC's newly published implementation report, she noted that the foundations are in place: National Roma Contact Points are stronger, dialogue with Roma civil society is more structured, and Roma have better access to jobs, healthcare and decent living conditions than in 2016. Progress nevertheless remains uneven: seven in ten Roma still live in poverty, just over half of Roma children attend early childhood education, and almost half attend schools where all or most pupils are Roma. She called for

[1] European Commission, 3 November 2026, *Report on the progress made in the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/589cc7e7-8086-4163-82e4-4e820432f4fc_en?filename=2026%20Roma%20Implementation%20report.pdf

clear national targets, stronger institutions, properly enforced rules, predictable investment and leaders willing to stand up to antigypsyism, and recalled the EC's proposal to more than double funding for equality under the future AgoraEU programme. Inclusion, she added, is about much more than filling jobs: Roma children, young people and women are full and equal members of society.

Ms Ana Carla Pereira, Director for Equality and Non-discrimination, DG Justice and Consumers, EC, thanked the Irish Presidency for its commitment to equality at a time when these values are being questioned. Presenting the main findings of the implementation report, she highlighted that governance has improved: all Member States have a National Roma Contact Point, several have increased staffing, and monitoring is more regular. However, coordination between national and local levels remains weak, and mainstream policies often lack Roma-specific safeguards and outreach. Of the seven objectives of the EU framework, only the employment objective is within reach, and even there the gender gap is widening and Roma women are being left behind. On the other objectives the EU is off track: antigypsyism is growing, poverty remains high, school segregation is not decreasing, Roma life expectancy remains around eight years below the average, and overcrowding in housing is worsening. She called on national authorities to give National Roma Contact Points a clear mandate and adequate resources, to set clear targets, to combine mainstream policies with targeted measures and to move from consultation to real participation. Roma inclusion should be reflected in the National and Regional Partnership Plans under the next MFF and remains an integral part of the accession process for enlargement partners. She concluded that there is no such thing as an effective policy if it is not resourced.

Delivering the welcoming address on behalf of the Traveller and Roma community, **Mr Martin Collins**, Co-Director of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Ireland, opened in the Travellers' language Gammon. He stressed that education and employment cannot be discussed without addressing systemic racism, residential segregation, poor living conditions and health inequalities, and placed the debate in a wider context of backsliding on human rights. While welcoming the improvements documented by the EC, he recalled that, according to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), no Member State is likely to achieve the EU-level targets on combating antigypsyism, and that this acknowledgment should be the starting point. The challenge lies not in the lack of policies but in their effective implementation. He called for adequate resources for civil society organisations under the next MFF and described the EU Roma Strategic Framework and its future iterations as the best opportunity for an integrated, coordinated and multidimensional response.

Keynote address

In his keynote address, *Reflecting on equality, participation and inclusion of Roma and Travellers*, **Mr Michael O'Flaherty**, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, described the situation of Roma and Travellers as Europe's greatest human rights scandal. Drawing on two years of visits to communities in Ireland, Finland, Slovakia, Greece and North Macedonia, documented in a photo exhibition and book presented at the venue, he emphasised the diversity and resilience of Roma and Traveller communities, in particular the determination of young people. He also reported on what he had witnessed: settlements in worse condition than anything he had seen while living in one of the poorest country in the world, gendered barriers in access to healthcare, the high incidence of suicide among young Traveller men, well-qualified young people rejected by employers once their name or address became known, and the over-policing of entire communities.

Mr O'Flaherty identified antigypsyism as the root concern and the leadership of Roma and Traveller women as a largely unrealised potential. He observed that results on the ground depend to a large extent

on the commitment of local government, acknowledged the growing role of National Roma Contact Points and of the EU Roma Strategic Framework in galvanising national action, and underlined the irreplaceable value of FRA data. Looking ahead, he called for vocal and persistent political leadership; an intergenerational rather than project-based approach to funding; continued support for strategic litigation; accountability for racism, including within institutions; and the principle that non-Roma must never work for the Roma and Traveller communities, but only ever with them. He concluded that hope is not just an aspiration but a duty.

Panel 1: Lived realities and good practices in education and employment

The first panel was introduced by the screening of the film *Roma On Par*, which portrays three Roma professionals – a teacher from Slovakia, an officer in the Bulgarian armed forces and a paramedic from Romania. Four speakers then shared their personal journeys and reflected on what helped them overcome barriers.

Ms Tracey Reilly, community and youth worker, Ireland, left school at the age of 12 because of racism, discrimination and the low expectations of teachers towards Traveller girls. She returned to education through further education courses and a community employment scheme at Pavee Point, and in 2021 graduated with a first-class honours degree in community and youth work, having followed online classes during the pandemic from a trailer without a reliable internet connection. She is currently unable to work because of the lack of childcare places, a general problem that is aggravated for Travellers and Roma by language, literacy and digital barriers. She stressed that Travellers are ambitious, but that their ambition is not matched by opportunities, and that many still have to hide their identity, surname or address to find work. Her message to governments was that existing education and employment policies must be fully resourced and implemented in partnership with Traveller and Roma organisations.

Mr Kristian Pompa, who works at the Irish Department of Education and Youth through the Civil Service Traveller and Roma Work Placement Programme, described the obstacles he had faced before the placement, including fear of interviews, discrimination and the need for training. Support from a liaison officer, a welcoming team and on-the-job training gave him the confidence and motivation to progress in his career. He called for equal opportunities so that young Roma can access education and employment and contribute to society.

Mr Michal Mižigar, Community Engagement Lead for Parent Communities at the National Pedagogical Institute, Czechia, recalled that in 1997 mainstream schools refused to enrol him as a Roma child with a hearing impairment, and that only his mother's persistence prevented his placement in a special school for children with intellectual disabilities. He described low expectations as a serious form of antigypsyism: he was told he would not pass the school-leaving examination or learn English, and is now completing a PhD in history. He argued that what are called Roma issues are in fact issues of European societies as a whole. He called for equal partnership with decision-makers at national and local levels and for the involvement of Roma parents in the desegregation process, noting that there are more than 130 segregated schools in Czechia and that some parents accept segregated schooling because their children feel safer there.

Mr Petrica Dulgheru, Executive Director of the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (REDI), argued that economic independence is a powerful response to racism and that Roma need lasting institutions of their own, including companies and investment vehicles. REDI has set up an investment fund with EUR 20 million, deployed through microfinance institutions in Romania, Serbia, Albania and

Moldova. After around 1,000 loans, the data show that Roma entrepreneurs repay at the same rate as the majority population, so the perceived risk is mispriced. In his view, the role of CSOs is to pilot and demonstrate what works, while governments must take up and scale successful approaches; the main obstacles are political will and know-how rather than the availability of funding. He added that three-year project cycles are too short to address complex challenges, pointed to the potential of financial instruments, and saw opportunities for Roma in skilled manual occupations that are less exposed to artificial intelligence.

In the discussion, a representative of the Government of Ukraine invited REDI to support Roma communities in the country's reconstruction; Mr Dulgheru referred to ongoing cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova on identifying barriers at community level. A representative of an Irish Traveller organisation raised the role of artificial intelligence in amplifying online racism against Roma and Travellers. Panellists replied that knowledge about Roma must be produced with Roma, and that civil society is engaging with technology companies, although Europe's influence over the development of AI models remains limited.

Panel 2: Political response and commitments

The second panel examined what effective implementation looks like at national level, the obstacles governments face and how they can be addressed.

Ms Kinga Dóra Szabó-Tóth, State Secretary for Social Affairs, Family Affairs and the Elderly, Hungary, presented a life-course approach to equal opportunities. She referred to Sure Start children's houses for children aged 0–3, after-school programmes combining learning support with social work, or university programmes that help students preserve their identity; and EU-funded employment programmes, notably for Roma women with only primary education. Kindergarten is compulsory and 73% of Roma children attend. The new government, in office for six months, is reviewing existing programmes to reduce parallel structures, and the new Ministry of Education and Children has launched reforms concerning segregated schools. She identified the ages of 10 and 14, at the transition to secondary education, as critical points at which Roma children are lost and where intervention is needed, and underlined the need to train future teachers and social workers to prevent prejudice.

Ms Edita Stejskalová, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs, Czechia, spoke both as a member of the government and as a Roma woman. She saw her task as returning to the values that are gradually fading from the debate: beyond equality, the deeper aim is freedom, which Roma cannot fully experience because of discrimination and antigypsyism. Her priority is the high unemployment of Roma, particularly in the more than 600 socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic, where the situation is deteriorating; Roma face poverty six times more often than the rest of the population. She called for impact indicators, for cooperation with the private sector, and for preventing a segregated labour market in which Roma are concentrated in unqualified occupations. On implementation, she stressed coordination and trust between ministries, the role of the Government Commissioner in extending the strategy to regional and local authorities, as well as consistent Roma participation and expertise. She asked the EC to bring national governments back to these values and to speak more with Member States about antigypsyism and its concrete forms, which Roma can describe best but which are little reflected in increasingly formal and technical strategic documents.

Ms Ina Majko, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Albania, began in Romani, stating that inclusion starts with belonging. Albania has revised history curricula to include Roma and Egyptian history and culture, and its new Action Plan 2026–2030 envisages piloting Romani language teaching. The number of scholarship recipients doubled in 2025, and almost 1,000 children received after-school support, yet 440 children dropped out of school, a reminder that access must translate into learning and completion. Last year, 356 Roma and Egyptian jobseekers entered vocational training and 192 completed it; the priority now is turning skills into livelihoods by involving employers, confronting discrimination and following up after recruitment. She highlighted two innovations of the new action plan: repeated consultations with grassroots Roma organisations and measures linked to budget indicators of line ministries. She expressed concern that grassroots organisations are insufficiently funded, asked how commitments would be sustained once Roma inclusion is no longer in the political spotlight, and called on the EU to maintain its funding and the Platform as a space for dialogue. For Albania, implementation is also essential for progress in the accession negotiations.

Mr Liam Herrick, Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, stressed the responsibility of equality bodies and national human rights institutions to show leadership. He pointed to positive Irish initiatives, such as the Civil Service Traveller and Roma Work Placement Programme and the Traveller apprenticeship programme, which need long-term investment beyond the pilot stage. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has developed, with Traveller and Roma researchers and organisations, a guide for employers on inclusive recruitment, support in the workplace and tackling workplace racism. In education, he identified barriers that can be dismantled: admission criteria favouring children of past pupils, the disproportionate use of reduced school days and of seclusion and restraint, low expectations, and insufficient training of teachers on racism. He underlined that only governments and the EU have the capacity to run public awareness work against antigypsyism, and that the Commission's enforcement role remains important in holding national governments to account.

Ms Gabriela Hrabanova, Executive Director of the ERGO Network, noted that improvements have not yet translated into genuine equality: segregation persists and inequalities remain significant for Roma women and young people. Drawing on ERGO's research on Roma child poverty, she argued that the response to poverty-related barriers in education should be practical support, such as free school meals, rather than punishment. She welcomed positive developments, including the permanent funding of more than 1,300 educational mediators in Bulgaria, and set out three priorities: enforceable school desegregation and investment in inclusive education from early childhood; stronger action against discrimination in recruitment and at work; and integrated support linking education, employment, housing, childcare and accessible public services. Civil society monitoring covering 35 EU and enlargement countries found that almost two thirds of EU respondents saw little or no progress since 2021 and that funding for national Roma strategies was traceable in only three countries. She called for a review of the effectiveness of EU coordination and follow-up mechanisms, more consistent use of infringement proceedings, visibility of Roma equality in the next MFF, sustained commitment throughout and after accession, sustainable funding for grassroots organisations, and an annual Platform, as requested in a joint civil society statement.

In the discussion, participants argued that occasional training is not enough and that education about racism and discrimination should be part of teachers' university education, and called for greater diversity among teaching staff. A representative of an Irish Traveller organisation asked how the EU could exert more influence on national policy. Panellists pointed to the leverage of the accession process for candidate countries and to the enforcement of EU equality law for Member States.

In a video message closing the morning session, **Ms Norma Foley TD**, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland, said that the theme of the Platform is ultimately about people and opportunities. Education changes lives, yet too many Roma continue to face barriers and discrimination. She affirmed that the voices, experience and leadership of Travellers and Roma must be at the centre of the decisions that affect them, and that lasting change happens when those most affected are active partners in policymaking.

Every Voice at the Table: participation in education and employment

In the afternoon, all participants worked for 90 minutes at 22 facilitated tables, each focusing on either education or employment. Each table discussed four questions: two on its theme, one on the EC's forthcoming guidance on the social inclusion of Roma children, and one on the use of EU funds under the current and next MFF. The priorities agreed at the tables were presented in plenary by two rapporteurs and will inform the EC's further work.

Education

Rapporteur: Ms Zuzana Konrádová, EU Affairs Coordinator, Eurochild.

- **Preventing and addressing antigypsyism in schools.** Participants called for Roma and Traveller history, culture and experiences, including the Roma Holocaust and contemporary antigypsyism, to be embedded in national curricula rather than treated as optional. Training on antigypsyism, unconscious bias and inclusive teaching should be mandatory for all teachers and school staff, in both initial education and continuing professional development, and should be developed and delivered with Roma and Traveller organisations and educational mediators. Schools need effective systems for recognising, reporting and responding to discrimination, backed by clear policies, dedicated funding and accountability.
- **Addressing segregation.** Participants asked for stronger anti-segregation legislation with effective enforcement and sanctions, national desegregation strategies supported by local action plans and regular inspections, and particular attention to the disproportionate placement of Roma children in special schools. Desegregation must cover segregation both between schools and within classrooms and be accompanied by investment in quality: mediators, scholarships, after-school programmes, additional learning support and the recruitment of Roma teachers and staff. Reliable, appropriately collected data are needed to monitor progress, and successful practices should be mapped and shared across the EU.
- **Guidance on Roma children.** The guidance should promote equal access to inclusive, high-quality education, including early childhood education, supported by targeted financial assistance, free school meals, transport and learning materials. It should state that school segregation must be explicitly prohibited, monitored and addressed, and that progress should be assessed by educational outcomes and the experience of children and families rather than participation figures alone. Roma children, parents and communities should be involved in designing, implementing and evaluating education policies, and the guidance should be practical and reflect local realities.
- **EU funding and the next MFF.** Access to EU and national funding should be simpler and less bureaucratic for local authorities and Roma civil society, with technical assistance, multiannual funding and dedicated resources for Roma inclusion that reach local communities and smaller organisations directly. Participants called for transparent allocation of resources, stronger

monitoring and accountability at all levels, and investment in Roma-led organisations and long-term local partnerships rather than short-term projects.

Employment

Rapporteur: Ms Cathleen McDonagh Clarke, Manage Education & Training Service, Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service.

- **Improving employment outcomes for Roma youth and women.** Participants called for a comprehensive, long-term approach with stronger pathways into work through mentoring, vocational training, scholarships, employer partnerships, work placements and career development, particularly for people with limited formal education. Initiatives should aim at quality, secure and sustainable jobs and be evaluated on job quality, retention and progression. Discrimination should be tackled through employer accountability, anti-racism training and the enforcement of anti-discrimination law, and wider barriers such as poverty and lack of childcare need to be addressed.
- **Breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.** Effective approaches combine investment in education, employment and empowerment, including support for entrepreneurship, cooperatives and economic inclusion initiatives, with integrated public services across education, housing, healthcare, childcare and social protection. They require the enforcement of equality law, awareness-raising against antigypsyism, substantial long-term funding, political leadership, and community-led and peer-supported approaches.
- **Guidance on Roma children.** From an employment perspective, the guidance should improve access to inclusive, high-quality education, provide targeted support for Roma women and girls, reduce the costs of school participation, expand accessible childcare and strengthen family engagement. It should promote clearer routes from education to employment through cooperation with local employment and social services, social economy initiatives and socially responsible public procurement, as well as better data to target support and measure outcomes.
- **EU funding and the next MFF.** Application and administrative procedures should be simplified, barriers such as co-financing requirements reduced, and practical support provided to local authorities, grassroots organisations and Roma communities. Funding should be traceable and measured against meaningful indicators of long-term outcomes, including gender equality, and multiannual funding should respond to real community needs through better coordination between national and local stakeholders.

Panel 3: What do we do next? Funding that works – concrete steps on education and employment

Ms Rozália Lakatos, Mayor of Halmajugra, Hungary, explained why substantial EU funding for Roma inclusion often produces poor results at local level: small municipalities lack the staff to prepare complex applications, some mayors fear political conflict with non-Roma voters, and the system is too centralised. She proposed concrete steps: permanent expert teams at county level, financed from EU funds, to prepare and manage projects for small municipalities; long-term funding, with successful projects automatically receiving follow-up support; financial rewards for municipalities that actively fight segregation and the suspension of funding for those that maintain it ("no inclusion, no money"); a requirement that local governments cooperate with local CSOs as equal partners; and an EU-funded network in which experienced mayors support their peers. She also called for stronger Roma

representation and recalled that Roma communities are not homogeneous, so that solutions must build on organisations that know local realities.

Ms Ana Carla Pereira endorsed the mayor's proposals and identified three priorities for the remainder of the current programming period. First, the link between national planning and local delivery must be strengthened, as allocations that exist on paper often do not reach the local level. Second, mainstream policies must be combined with targeted measures, such as Roma health mediators, under a whole-of-government approach with clear accountability. Third, funding should focus on desegregation and should not be invested in segregated settings; governments should map segregated settlements, in cooperation with the communities concerned, and adopt practical roadmaps. On the forthcoming guidance, she noted that although Roma children are among the most deprived, they have in most Member States not been targeted by the European Child Guarantee. The guidance should help connect the Child Guarantee with the national Roma strategic frameworks, share good practices and serve as a call for action to national and regional authorities.

Ms Eileen Flynn, Senator, *Oireachtas*, Ireland, stressed that good policies, legislation and budgets exist but are not implemented, and that funds allocated to Traveller-specific accommodation are regularly underspent. She pointed to the continued use of reduced timetables for Traveller children and to Travellers who must hide their identity at work, and observed that supporting Travellers and Roma rarely brings political reward. Grassroots organisations are effective in empowering communities but are overstretched by successive crises, including in mental health; responsibility and accountability for decades of failure lie with governments, not with civil society. In her view, it is not about reinventing the wheel but about working with what already exists.

Ms Patricia Bezunartea Barrio, Director General for Family Diversity and Social Services, Spain, presented four pillars of effective implementation. The first is multilevel and participatory governance: in Spain's decentralised system, the national, regional and local levels coordinate continuously, and the State Council of the Roma People, established in 2005, takes part in planning, implementation and monitoring through thematic working groups. The second is sustained, structural investment aligned with clearly defined objectives, regardless of whether funding comes from EU, national, regional or local budgets; the ESF+ has made it possible to run long-term programmes that are now being scaled up. The third is accountability: collecting evidence, while respecting fundamental rights, in order to prioritise what works and stop what does not. The fourth is transforming good practices into structural public policy. She cited the recently adopted strategic plan for inclusive education and the action plan for improving the employability of the Roma population 2025–2028, funded with more than EUR 304 million and combining personalised pathways, vocational and digital training, access to public employment and partnerships with private employers.

In the discussion, a civil society representative from Bulgaria noted that the specific investment priority on the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma is not included in the proposals for the next programming period, and asked how Roma-targeted investment could be secured in the National and Regional Partnership Plans. Ms Pereira replied that the negotiations on the MFF are ongoing and that, under the EC's proposal, the plans will be negotiated on the basis of the European Semester and the country-specific recommendations, which in relevant cases refer explicitly to Roma inclusion; it is therefore important that Member States reflect Roma inclusion in their plans from the outset. A representative of an Irish Traveller organisation underlined that Irish Travellers, Roma and other groups across Europe are not a single homogeneous group, and asked whether states should formally

apologise for past injustices. Senator Flynn considered that such an apology would be deserved, although it is not her immediate priority, and that the question should first be discussed within the community.

Closing session

Mr Hristo Petrov, Member of the European Parliament (Renew Europe) and chair of the Parliament's working group on the Child Guarantee, underlined that inclusion is achieved only when people can enjoy their rights in practice. Education and employment cannot be treated as separate policy questions, as equal access to both determines a person's independence and participation in society. He preferred to speak of agency rather than empowerment, as agency is something everyone has and education expands it. He presented the European Child Guarantee and the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy as instruments for building a strong foundation in childhood, and argued that, within a more flexible EU budget, funding set aside for children should remain protected. The measure of success is whether a child has more choices than before.

Ms Ana Carla Pereira concluded that work on Roma inclusion by non-Roma cannot be credible without Roma at the table. She summarised the main messages of the day: what works in education and employment is known, but the exception must become the norm; commitments must be translated into concrete solutions on the ground; stable funding is needed for Roma-specific measures, with clear targets and real participation of Roma organisations that goes beyond consultation; and EU funding must reach Roma communities and support desegregation, which depends on cooperation between national and local levels. As next steps, the EC will use the implementation report as a working tool for dialogue with national authorities and intensify bilateral exchanges to identify obstacles to progress; prepare the guidance on Roma children; promote Roma inclusion in the negotiations on the 2028–2034 MFF and the National and Regional Partnership Plans; and continue working with enlargement partners. The Platform will be convened again on the occasion of the evaluation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework. With four years remaining until 2030, this is a time for action.

Closing the Platform on behalf of the Irish Presidency, **Mr Kevin McCarthy**, Secretary General of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland, thanked participants, and in particular Traveller and Roma representatives, for the honesty with which they had shared their experiences. He recalled that the Presidency has placed strong emphasis on upholding the Union's values, which are not a weakness to be defended, but a strength to be harnessed. Participation in education and employment is a pathway to dignity, independence and equality, and policies are most effective when they are informed by the people they are intended to serve. The insights and good practices shared will contribute to the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework and inform policy at European, national and local levels.