

19th European Platform for Roma Inclusion
Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Participation in Education and Employment
5 November 2026, Dublin
Discussion Paper¹

1. Introduction: the link between education and employment

Education and employment are closely interlinked. Formal education and training are among the most important determinants of a person's position in the labour market, while the labour market position of parents shapes the conditions in which their children grow up and learn. Children are disproportionately affected by poverty, as they face cumulative disadvantages from an early age that increase the risk of intergenerational exclusion and limit social mobility. According to FRA's Roma Survey 2024, 77% of Roma² children live in households at risk of poverty, around four times the rate among children in the general population (19%) in the countries surveyed.³ The availability and accessibility of good-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are, first and foremost, a right of the child⁴ and one of the most effective means of preventing early disadvantage. They also enable parents, in particular women, who in many families still bear the primary responsibility for childcare, to take up employment.⁵

Improving the educational and labour market outcomes of Roma is primarily a matter of equality and fundamental rights, and it also strengthens the social and economic resilience of Europe, which faces demographic change and growing labour and skills shortages. As one of Europe's youngest population groups, Roma represent a growing share of future labour market entrants in several Member States.⁶ The [EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020–2030](#) sets headline targets in both areas. In education, the gap in ECEC participation and the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools should be cut by at least half, and the gap in upper-secondary completion reduced by at least one third. In employment, the employment gap, the gender employment gap among Roma and the gap in the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) should be cut by at least half. Progress towards these targets is uneven. EU averages conceal considerable differences between Member States, both in the situation of Roma and in the pace of change, reflecting different starting points, the size and composition of Roma populations, and national institutional and policy contexts.

2. Education: quality should not be a matter of luck

Quality education should equip children with knowledge and skills, but also support their personal development, identity and citizenship. On average in the EU, participation of Roma children in ECEC has increased from 42% in 2016 to 53% in 2024, although it remains far below the rate among children in the general population (95%). This reflects a broader trend, as an increasing number of Member States have made pre-school education compulsory and free of charge, or introduced a legal entitlement to a place, often for ever younger children. Significant investments in kindergarten capacity have relied largely on EU funds, including about EUR 1 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for ECEC infrastructure in 2021–2027 and about EUR 7 billion under the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF).⁷ It is widely acknowledged that ECEC is so important for children that, in the case of isolated communities, proximity of

¹ This discussion paper was prepared by Marek Hojsík (Democracy Institute of Central European University, Budapest, and Faculty of Science of Charles University, Prague). The draft paper was consulted with civil society organisations and experts.

² Unless otherwise specified, this paper uses "Roma" as an umbrella term that includes Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Manouches, Camminanti and other groups, as well as the population administratively designated as Gens du Voyage. In several Member States, more than one of these groups live side by side. Their identities, histories and needs may differ and should not be treated as homogeneous.

³ FRA (2025), [Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries – Perspectives from the Roma Survey 2024](#). The survey covered Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain, as well as Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia; EU averages refer to the ten Member States. Unless stated otherwise, data in this paper come from this source.

⁴ [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), principle 11 (Childcare and support to children).

⁵ European Commission, Joint Research Centre (2023), [Increasing early childhood education and care participation can promote women's employment](#).

⁶ Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Employment and employability of Roma in the EU](#), Introduction and section 2.7.

⁷ European Commission (2025), [Education and Training Monitor 2025, Comparative report, chapter 3](#).

kindergartens takes precedence over desegregation.⁸ Yet segregation in kindergartens is not acceptable where it can be avoided.

This improvement at the start of the educational pathway is not reflected in its later stages, where progression to higher levels of education and completion remain major challenges. Only 32% of young Roma aged 20–24 participating in the 2024 FRA survey have completed at least upper-secondary education (28% in 2016), compared with 84% in the general population. Among Roma adults, only 26% have completed upper-secondary, vocational, post-secondary or short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 3–5), while a negligible share (close to 0%) has completed university education (ISCED 6–8), compared with 50% and 36% respectively on average in EU countries.⁹

Segregation in education persists, although it is a form of discrimination prohibited under the Racial Equality Directive. Every second Roma child (46%) attends a school where all or most pupils are Roma, a share that has not changed significantly since 2016 (44%). Segregation is closely linked to housing: 63% of Roma children in predominantly Roma areas attend segregated schools, compared with 12% of those living in mixed areas. Segregated schools and classes often offer lower-quality education, reduced curricula, fewer qualified staff and lower expectations, which limit pupils' well-being, the development of their potential and talents, as well as their prospects for further education.¹⁰ In several Member States, Roma pupils are placed in special schools or classes, often under the pretext of language deficits or behaviour issues rather than genuine developmental needs. However, reducing placements in special education does not in itself end segregation; Roma pupils may continue to concentrate in lower-quality mainstream schools or follow curricula with reduced learning outcomes even at formally "mainstream" schools. While desegregation is a lengthy and complex process, the quality of education in disadvantaged schools needs to be improved immediately.

Segregation is not the only manifestation of antigypsyism in education. The share of Roma who felt discriminated against in contact with schools doubled from 7% to 14%. Low expectations, bias and bullying can undermine Roma pupils' sense of belonging and their motivation to stay in education. Other barriers include the costs of transport, meals, learning materials and digital devices, poor housing conditions, learning in a language other than the home language, and enrolment procedures that disadvantage families with limited access to information or digital services. Inclusive schools therefore require teachers trained to recognise bias and antigypsyism, and support that reaches families before absence or disengagement is attributed to children or their parents. Including Roma history and culture in curricula would benefit all pupils by strengthening mutual understanding and helping to counter prejudice.

Several interlinked factors explain why the gaps persist. In decentralised education systems, the quality of pre-school, primary and secondary education depends largely on the "lottery" of where a child is born. The catchment area and the priority the local government gives to the quality of education both play a role. These circumstances shape the child's entire educational trajectory and, subsequently, their position in the labour market. Where schools are an autonomous competence of small municipalities, those without marginalised Roma communities have little motivation to take part in the desegregation of schools in neighbouring municipalities.

Member States have taken steps to make their education systems more inclusive, including ECEC expansion, educational mediators and assistants, and scholarships, mentoring and reserved places in secondary and higher education. Some have integrated EU-funded pilots into national systems. For example, since 2023, Bulgaria has financed mediators, social workers and teaching assistants in schools with a concentration of vulnerable pupils from its state budget, and Czechia and Slovakia have followed a similar path. Measures addressing segregation more directly include transport support, adjustments to enrolment procedures and additional teaching staff.

⁸ Hojsík, M. (2024), [Roma equality, inclusion and participation in territorial planning and development](#), discussion paper for the 17th European Platform for Roma Inclusion, Brussels, 1 October 2024.

⁹ OECD (2026), [Education at a Glance 2026](#), Table A1.1 (unweighted average of 25 EU Member States, adults aged 25–64); ISCED 3–5 and 6–8 calculated by the author.

¹⁰ Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Employment and employability of Roma in the EU](#), section 2.4.

However, many inclusive education measures still rely on short-term project funding, monitoring of desegregation outcomes remains uneven, and inclusive mainstream settings need to provide comprehensive social, emotional, psychological and language support. While national governments bear the main responsibility for legislation, funding and standards, implementation depends on school founders, school heads and teachers, parents, mediators, and Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations.

3. Employment: education is necessary, but not sufficient

Roma participation in paid work has improved markedly. In 2024, 54% of Roma aged 20–64 (69% men and 38% women) were in paid work, up from 43% in 2016, and the share of Roma NEETs aged 16–24 fell from 63% to 47%. This brings the EU Roma Strategic Framework’s target of at least 60% of Roma (45% for Roma women) in paid work by 2030 within reach, and several Member States¹¹ are on track to meet the employment targets. The gap with the general population nevertheless remains significant: the general employment rate is 75%, and the Roma NEET rate is still around five times the general rate (9%). Employment inequalities are particularly pronounced for women, with only 38% of Roma women in paid work compared with 69% of Roma men, or a 61% NEET rate among Roma women compared to 32% among Roma men. These widening gaps reflect multiple, interconnected barriers (childcare, low attainment, discrimination, limited economic independence) that women face.

Civil society monitoring suggests that the recent improvement reflects mainly overall labour market developments, such as post-pandemic recovery and labour shortages, rather than policy reforms.¹² Favourable labour market conditions are therefore a window of opportunity: targeted policies can build on them to make the gains durable, extend them to Roma women and young people, and help Roma move from low-paid and insecure work into stable, quality jobs. Moreover, the employment indicator measures only participation in work, not its quality, so informal, insecure and low-paid jobs also count as progress.

Formal education is only one variable in the equation, although an important one, as weak education or training that does not match labour market demand significantly weakens a jobseeker’s position. However, education that matches labour market demand does not automatically lead to employment. Reported discrimination against Roma increased both when looking for work (from 16% to 36%) and at the workplace (from 5% to 22%). Other barriers include unequal access to professional networks, information and social capital, as well as institutional practices and recruitment norms that can disadvantage people from communities affected by long-term exclusion. Repeated experiences of discrimination may also reduce self-esteem and trust in institutions and the labour market. Indebtedness, the ethnic pay gap and low wages can further discourage formal employment.¹³ Many Roma employees face lower pay, fewer opportunities for training and promotion, insecure and exploitative contracts, reduced employment rights, poor and often unsafe working conditions and a lack of work-life balance, and many conceal their identity to avoid exclusion.¹⁴ Prejudice among customers can undermine even successful placements. Employers can be part of the solution. Diversity and inclusion programmes can help employers recruit and retain young Roma, as illustrated by the partnership between Tesco and the CSO *Človek v ohrození* in Slovakia, which combines training placements, mentoring and inclusion training for store staff.¹⁵

The gender gap reflects care responsibilities, as the lack, inaccessibility or high cost of childcare services are reported as major barriers to the employment of Roma women. It is also shaped by inequalities accumulated over the life course, such as interrupted education, including in connection with early motherhood, and limited access to vocational training. Employment support for women therefore needs to be gender-sensitive and to combine accessible ECEC with second-chance education and active labour market measures for women returning to work after childbirth. In Romania, for example, health mediation has provided a pathway to employment for Roma women.¹⁶

¹¹ BG, ES, HU, IT, RO.

¹² Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Employment and employability of Roma in the EU](#), section 3.1.

¹³ Ibid., section 2.5.

¹⁴ Ibid., section 2.6.

¹⁵ Ibid., section 4.3.

¹⁶ Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Employment and employability of Roma in the EU](#), section 4.1.

Most Member States implement active labour market measures (ALMPs) from which Roma can benefit, including work placements, apprenticeships and vocational training. Some emphasise digital and future-oriented skills, as the Acceder programme in Spain does.¹⁷ To what extent Roma actually benefit is difficult to assess, as data on their participation and on the effects of the measures are largely missing. Where evidence exists, it points to unequal access. A pattern has been recorded whereby people from segregated Roma communities tend to be indirectly excluded (e.g. because of lack of necessary registration, high travel costs or mistrust) or participate in less effective ALMP measures than other jobseekers; in particular, Roma are disproportionately involved in public or community work programmes, which have limited or no positive effects on subsequent employment in the open labour market.

ALMPs should also focus more on employers, assisting them to recruit, adapt workplaces for and retain disadvantaged employees. Local and regional initiatives increasingly target Roma NEETs and women, and the social economy offers further pathways. In June 2025, Spain adopted its first state employment plan for the Roma population (2025–2028), with 14 measures addressing 107,000 unemployed Roma and a budget of EUR 304 million, mainly financed by the ESF+.¹⁸

Many Member States nevertheless rely primarily on mainstream employment measures that lack Roma-specific outreach and safeguards, and rarely assess whether these measures actually reach Roma and with what outcomes. Although most national Roma strategic frameworks now attribute Roma unemployment to structural causes, their actions focus mainly on the supply side (training and activation). The demand side, including discrimination by employers and the inclusiveness of workplaces, receives far less attention.¹⁹ Adult learning and second-chance pathways, including literacy support, remain essential for early school leavers and adults.

4. Lessons learnt

Inclusive reforms of education and employment systems that reflect the needs of Roma benefit all learners and jobseekers facing disadvantage. Experience shows that under ethnically blind policies Roma tend to be the last in the imaginary queue of beneficiaries. Mainstream measures need explicit safeguards, such as outreach, targets and monitoring, ensuring that Roma are not excluded.

Effective desegregation in education cannot be limited to policymaking but requires support for implementation at the grassroots level, where resistance must be expected. Such resistance is not only a matter of prejudice; it is also driven by institutional, financial and political disincentives at local level. The costs of desegregation are localised and immediate, while its benefits are long-term and accrue to wider society. Desegregation efforts must therefore be backed by enforcement and accompanied by support for those who bear most of the costs, namely receiving schools, teachers, municipalities and families.

Roma parents should be supported to exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their children's education. In the Czech city of Ostrava, the grassroots community organising initiative Awen Amenca has mobilised Roma parents to enrol their children in non-segregated schools.²⁰ Following its results, Czechia has started financially supporting Roma CSOs through dedicated ESF+ calls to underpin its desegregation efforts.²¹

Governance arrangements matter. Where education is an autonomous competence of small municipalities, a re-centralisation of certain competences should be considered, not necessarily to the central level but perhaps to an intermediate level. Re-centralisation alone is not sufficient, however, as de facto segregation patterns may be maintained by parallel systems of private or church schools with selective admission offering an exit from state schools.

¹⁷ Ibid., section 4.5.

¹⁸ Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration of Spain, OBERAXE (2025), [El Gobierno aprueba el primer Plan estatal de empleo para la población gitana](#).

¹⁹ Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Employment and employability of Roma in the EU](#), section 3.2.

²⁰ Awen Amenca, [About us](#).

²¹ Roma Civil Monitor (2025), country fiche on Czechia, [romacivilmonitoring.eu](#).

In employment, education and training that meet labour market needs are necessary but not sufficient preconditions. Equally important is making the labour market inclusive by addressing prejudice, discrimination and racism among employers, colleagues and customers, and supporting individuals in building self-esteem, networks and trust. Across both fields, successful measures need to move from short-term projects to stable funding. They also need to be embedded in long-term strategies integrating education, employment, ECEC, housing and social services, as the Spanish employment plan does.

Finally, Roma participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of interventions is a question not only of effectiveness but also of legitimacy. Just as measures promoting gender equality could hardly be designed by men alone, interventions targeting Roma should involve Roma and Roma CSOs. Meaningful participation goes beyond ad hoc consultation or involvement in outreach activities: it starts at an early stage, when priorities are set, and includes transparent feedback on how Roma input was taken into account. It should be supported by adequate resources, capacity-building and institutional recognition, strengthening the capacity of Roma-led organisations as independent partners. Particular attention should be paid to the participation of Roma women, young people and other vulnerable groups, including in policies on education, school-to-work transitions and youth employment, and to practical barriers that prevent them from taking part.

5. The role of the EU, EU funds and the next multiannual financial framework (MFF)

Member States bear primary responsibility for implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the related [2021 Council Recommendation](#), and the EU supports their efforts through legislation and its enforcement, policy coordination and funding. The [Racial Equality Directive](#) prohibits discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, including in education and employment. The Commission has opened infringement proceedings²² concerning the segregation of Roma children in education against Czechia (2014), Hungary (2016) and Slovakia (2015), and referred the case against the latter to the Court of Justice in 2023. In 2025, the Advocate General²³ concluded that Slovakia had systematically and persistently failed to fulfil its obligations under the Directive. These developments, together with an additional letter of formal notice to Czechia in 2024, have prompted both countries to address school segregation more substantively.

Recent EU policy initiatives address both education and employment. The [2026 Communication strengthening the European Child Guarantee](#), established by a Council Recommendation in 2021, announces dedicated guidance on integrated measures for Roma children. A subsequent [ESF+ call](#) provides EUR 5 million for transnational projects improving access to employment for Roma NEETs. [The Principles for effective anti-poverty policies accompanying the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy](#) call for targeted programmes improving learning opportunities for pupils from low-income households. These include additional funding for schools, professional development of teachers, mentoring, scholarships, and desegregation measures, including for Roma. The Council Recommendations [on digital skills in education and training](#) (2023) and [on human capital](#) (2026) explicitly recognise Roma among the groups requiring attention.

Recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) have supported education reforms, including support for disadvantaged schools in Czechia,²⁴ and EU technical support is helping Slovakia prepare a national action plan for the desegregation of Roma children in education.²⁵ Experience with the RRP has shown the potential of a performance-based approach to EU funding, which helped introduce necessary inclusive reforms.

In the 2021–2027 period, the ESF+ and ERDF support both targeted and mainstream measures, and a dedicated thematic enabling condition links the use of funds to national Roma strategic frameworks.²⁶ In some countries, these provisions have contributed to more targeted investments in Roma equality, inclusion and

²² On the scope of the Directive, see FRA, [Impact of the Racial Equality Directive](#). On the proceedings: European Commission (2023), [IP/23/2249](#); Romea.cz (2024), [European Commission warns Czechia](#); ERRC (2016), [EU: Commission probe must spell the end of Romani segregation in Hungarian schools](#).

²³ ERRC (2025), [Slovakia in the dock: Advocate General finds systematic and persistent failures to end school segregation](#); Case C-799/23, *Commission v Slovakia*.

²⁴ European Commission (2025), [Education and Training Monitor 2025 – Czechia](#).

²⁵ UNICEF (2026), [Technical support for education desegregation of Roma children in Slovakia](#).

²⁶ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 ([Common Provisions Regulation](#)), Annex IV; European Commission (2023), [Assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks](#).

participation,²⁷ but their overall impact is yet to be assessed; such an assessment could better inform the architecture of the next programming period.

Under the [Commission's proposals for the 2028–2034 multiannual financial framework](#), presented in July and September 2025, cohesion and social funding would be programmed through National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs). Negotiations are ongoing,²⁸ with agreement sought by the end of 2026. The NRPPs offer an opportunity to address the challenges discussed in this paper in a more comprehensive and targeted manner. It is important that Member States use it by including explicit measures for Roma in their plans, notably on the quality of education and desegregation, access to employment services and formal employment, and against antigypsyism and discrimination. These measures should be underpinned by Roma-specific milestones and indicators, with regular public reporting. Mainstream investments should include safeguards ensuring that Roma benefit from them, and Roma and Roma-led civil society organisations should be involved in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the plans, beyond ad hoc consultation.

Discussion questions

EDUCATION

1. What approaches have proven most effective in preventing and addressing antigypsyism in schools?
2. How can education systems address segregation and ensure equal educational opportunities for Roma children in communities experiencing concentrated poverty?
3. In its Communication Breaking the cycle of child poverty – strengthening the European Child Guarantee (COM(2026) 539), the Commission recognises that poverty, discrimination and segregation too often limit Roma children's effective access to services. It has therefore committed to preparing, together with stakeholders, a Guidance on integrated measures for the social inclusion of Roma children, scheduled for 2027, and wants to hear your views first. From an education perspective, what should this Guidance include? What would you consider essential for the guidance, and can you point to any examples of good practice?
4. Local budgets are often highly constrained. How can national governments encourage local authorities to use EU funds, in the current and future MFF, for inclusive, desegregated education?

EMPLOYMENT

1. What approaches have been most successful in improving employment outcomes, especially for Roma youth and women, particularly during the transition from education to work?
2. What integrated approaches have proven effective in breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty and supporting sustainable employment for Roma?
3. Children's chances also depend on their families' situation. Under the strengthened European Child Guarantee (COM(2026) 539), the Commission has committed to preparing a Guidance on the social inclusion of Roma children scheduled for 2027 and is now seeking your views on what it should cover. From an employment perspective, what should this Guidance include to help break the cycle of poverty? What would you consider essential for the guidance, and can you point to any examples of good practice?
4. How can national governments encourage local authorities to use EU funds, in the current and future MFF, to improve employment for Roma youth and women? What prevents local authorities and Roma organisations from accessing these funds?

²⁷ Roma Civil Monitor (2026), [Civil society's assessment of the implementation of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks in the EU. Synthesis report](#).

²⁸ Council of the EU (2026), [MFF 2028–2034: Council backs simpler and more efficient rules for cohesion funds](#).