

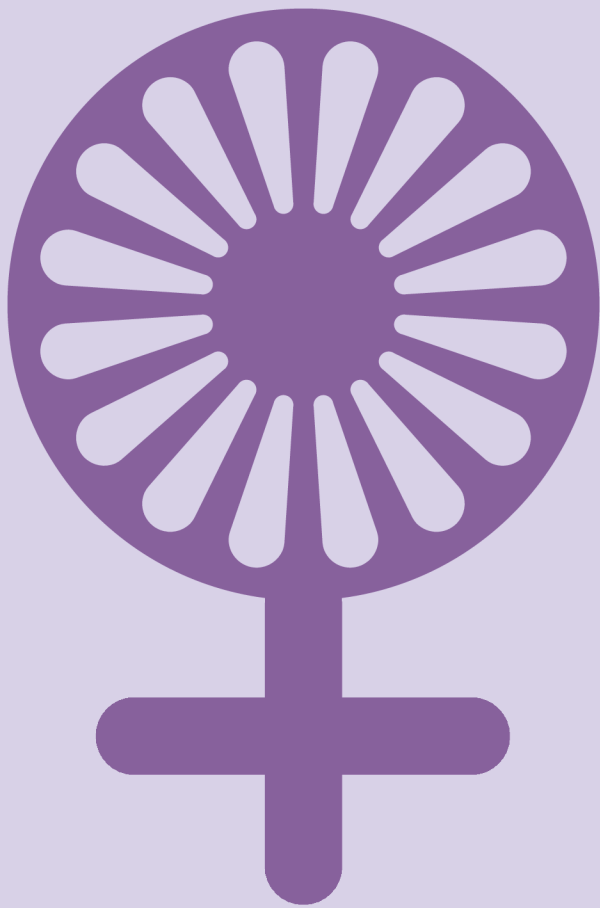
The Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts

INTERSECTIONAL VIOLENCE AND SYSTEMIC FAILURE



An International Report on Gender-Based Violence and
Racism Against Roma and Traveller Women in Bosnia and
Herzegovina, Hungary, Romania, Spain, and the United
Kingdom





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The Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts

The Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts is a European Roma Feminist initiative led by and for Roma women working at the intersection of gender justice and antiracism. Grounded in a Roma decolonial feminist understanding of violence as systemic—produced by racist, classist, and heteropatriarchal structures—we demand institutional accountability while advancing community-centered responses to harm. Our mission is to dismantle the structures that enable violence against Roma women and girls by strengthening collective power, transforming lived experiences into structural change, and amplifying Roma women's expertise in policymaking. We build and sustain a transnational Roma feminist network that documents and challenges systemic violence, promotes justice and safety, and ensures that Roma women and girls shape the systems and futures that impact their lives.

Sebijan Fejzula - Project Coordinator

Served as a junior researcher at the **Centre for Social Studies in the project POLÍTICS**- *the politics of anti-racism in Europe and Latin America* and concurrently pursues a Ph.D. in Human Rights at the University of Coimbra. She is a co-editor for the book titled *"State Racism: A Collective View from the Perspective of Autonomy and Racial Justice"* (2023) and boasts authorship of *"Deepening into the guts of European Modernity: Romanipen and Blackness as political antidote against white domination"* (2025); *"De-Whitening of Romani Women's Intersectional Experience"* (2023); *"Anti-Roma Racism, Social Work, and the White Civilisatory Mission"* (2022); among others. Furthermore, Co-founding member of Kale Amenge (Roma for Ourselves), an independent anti-racist Roma organisation dedicated to advancing the collective emancipation of the Roma people and the establishment of Roma political autonomy.



Senada Sali – National Expert for Bosnia and Hercegovina

Is a human rights lawyer and the Legal Director at the **European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)**. With over a decade of experience in strategic litigation and advocacy, she has led landmark cases before national and international human rights bodies addressing discrimination against Roma across various thematic areas. Originally from North Macedonia, she is a leading voice for Romani women's rights in Europe. Her work integrates legal action, research, and feminist activism to challenge structural racism and amplify Romani women's leadership.



Vivien Brassói – National Expert for Hungary and United Kingdom

Is a Romani feminist activist and lawyer from Hungary, currently the Legal Director of the **European Roma Rights Centre** where she engages in strategic litigation to ensure that the **ERRC** is supporting Romani people to make cutting edge legal arguments in and out of court to achieve radical change across Europe in multiple thematic areas. With nearly a decade of experience in strategic litigation, advocacy, and community-driven research, her work focuses on advancing Roma rights, gender justice, and addressing intersectional discrimination across Europe.



Cerasela Bănică – National Expert for Romania

Is a human rights lawyer and a **State Secretary at the National Council for Combating Discrimination in Romania**. With extensive experience in advancing equality, inclusion, and access to justice, her work focuses on combating structural discrimination and promoting gender equality. She has led strategic advocacy efforts to strengthen anti-discrimination frameworks and improve protection for victims of inequality and abuse. A long-time advocate for Roma rights and women's empowerment, her work bridges legal action and social justice to drive systemic change.



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We implemented this project in collaboration with our sister organizations across Europe because bringing local knowledge to the European level is at the heart of feminist and community-based approach:



Amuge, Spain

Advocating for Roma women's rights and access to justice.



Care for young people's future, UK

Supporting Traveller and Roma women to build community-based leadership.



E-Romnja, Romania

Romania Roma feminist, a-political and non-profit organization that fights for the rights of Roma women and girls.



KALI SARA, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Strengthening Roma women's participation and visibility in national and regional decision-making.



Romaversitas, Hungary

Empowering Roma youth and women through education and advocacy.

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Roma Women in Action— A Pan-European Call for Justice and Protection

"I knocked on every door when I tried to report domestic abuse, but no one offered support. The police took the perpetrator for one night and returned him home by morning. This went on for 20 years. The system failed us completely."

Participant from Bosnia and Hercegovina

Across Europe, Romani, Sinti, Traveller women and girls navigate a landscape defined by a dual crisis: the pervasive threat of gender-based violence and the entrenched reality of institutional anti-Roma racism. Their lives are not marked by a single form of discrimination but by the inseparable intertwining of racism and sexism—a systemic condition that scholars and activists such as Margareta Matache, Ethel Brooks, and Angela Kóczé have powerfully framed as **gendered anti-Roma racism**. This structural violence, as documented in the work of these and other Roma women academics, is neither incidental nor cultural; it is a political and institutional reality that shapes every facet of existence. For too long, our experiences have been rendered invisible, our calls for help ignored, and our protection systematically failed by the very institutions designed to safeguard us.

This international report, *Roma Women in Action*, emerges from the urgent need to document, analyse, and dismantle this intersectional injustice. It is born from the collective expertise, lived realities, and resolute advocacy of 48 Romani and Traveller women activists, professionals, and community leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Through a series of intensive three-day online national workshops held in late 2025, these women—who are not merely subjects of study but agents of change—mapped the structural drivers of violence, documented its brutal manifestations, and formulated concrete, actionable pathways to justice. This report synthesises their findings to present a unified, pan-European analysis of the interconnected challenges and to issue a powerful call for systemic reform. The experiences of Romani and Traveller women cannot be understood by examining gender-based violence or racism in isolation. As the national reports reveal with startling consistency, their vulnerability is manufactured at the intersection of patriarchy, poverty, and structural racism. This creates a unique and heightened risk profile. In Hungary and Romania, economic exclusion and labour market discrimination trap women in abusive relationships. A participant from Hungary articulated this stark reality: *"If I leave him, I can't survive. I'm 'just a mother,' I have no money, nowhere to go."* In Spain and the United Kingdom, public discourse and media narratives actively construct Romani women as culturally prone to violence or as social burdens,

legitimising institutional neglect. A central, harrowing finding across all five countries is the profound institutional betrayal that Romani women face. Police, social services, healthcare, and child protection systems—intended as sources of safety—are frequently reported as sites of further trauma, disbelief, and discrimination. This systemic failure was voiced with painful clarity by a participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina: *"I knocked on every door when I tried to report domestic abuse, but no one offered support. The police took the perpetrator for one night and returned him home by morning. This went on for 20 years. The system failed us completely."*

Police & Justice Systems: From Bosnia and Herzegovina, where police return perpetrators home by morning after minimal action, to Hungary, where officers refuse to file reports with the dismissive comment "Roma sort things out within the family," law enforcement consistently fails to protect. In Spain, judicial rulings have invoked racist stereotypes about "early marriage culture" to reduce sentences for sexual abuse of Romani girls, creating a devastating precedent of impunity.

Healthcare & Reproductive Violence: Degrading and discriminatory treatment in healthcare, particularly in maternity wards, is a pervasive form of institutional gender-based violence. Reports from Hungary and Romania detail denial of pain relief, humiliating comments, and segregated treatment. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a government minister publicly blamed Romani women for healthcare debt, exemplifying the hostile attitudes they confront.

Child Protection as a Threat: Perhaps the most powerful deterrent to reporting violence is the widespread fear of child removal. In the UK, Hungary, and Romania, participants described child protection services not as a support but as a punitive force. A participant from the UK captured the agonising paradox: *"Child protection becomes a threat, not help. Reporting domestic violence just exposes you to losing your children."* This fear, echoed across borders, reveals a system that punishes vulnerability rather than addressing it.

This "continuum of violence," as identified in the UK report, stretches from the home to the classroom, the hospital, and the police station. Each sphere reinforces the next, locking women in cycles of abuse with no safe exit. A critical structural driver identified in every national context is the systematic erasure of Romani women from official policy and data. National strategies on gender equality, Roma inclusion and Actions plans against racism routinely lack intersectional measures, specific budgets, or meaningful participation from Romani women's organisations. As the Spanish report notes, even national macro-surveys on violence against women fail to include ethnicity as a variable, rendering Romani women statistically invisible. This data gap is not a passive oversight but an active form of institutional racism. A participant from the UK stated unequivocally: *"If there is no data, the problem does not exist. So, there is no funding. Roma women are invisible."* Without ethnically disaggregated data on domestic violence, trafficking, or access to shelters—as highlighted in reports from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary—governments cannot design effective policies or be held accountable for

their failures. The system, as another participant noted, *"talks about us, but not with us. That's why our real problems never appear in the reports."*

Confronted by this landscape of systemic failure, the Roma Women in Action capacity-building project was conceived to transform lived experience into expert advocacy. In November 2025, 48 Romani women across five countries participated in intensive three-day online workshops. The curriculum moved from analysis to action: building knowledge of Council of Europe mechanisms (ECRI, GREVIO, ADI-ROM), developing skills in human rights monitoring and documentation, and crafting targeted advocacy recommendations. The workshops created rare spaces of trust and critical analysis where participants could articulate the patterns of violence they have witnessed and endured. *"We didn't only learn about these issues, we lived them. Every sentence that was said here is familiar from our own lives,"* reflected a participant from Hungary. This grounding in lived reality is the bedrock of this report's credibility and its demands.

This report serves a dual purpose:

To Synthesize and Validate a Common Struggle: By merging the findings from five distinct national contexts, it demonstrates that the discrimination faced by Romani women is not a series of isolated national failures but a pan-European systemic crisis. The commonalities—institutional anti-Roma racism, fear of child removal, data erasure, economic dependence—are overwhelming and demand a coordinated European response.

To Centre Solutions from the Community: The recommendations that follow are not imposed from above. They are the concrete, community-driven proposals formulated by the workshop participants themselves. They call for transformative change: the official recognition of anti-Roma racism; mandatory anti-racist training for all frontline professionals; the design of policies with Romani women; the collection of intersectional data; and sustainable funding for Roma women-led organizations. As noted in the Dalan report, "(...) organizers often have to pigeonhole their work into a single silo to receive funding, rather than present the full richness of their organizing to funders. Issues such as LGBTQIA + rights, economic justice, sex workers' rights, and Roma rights are among the most underfunded."^[1]

This report is a testament to the resilience and expertise of Romani and Traveller women. It stands on the shoulders of academic work that has long named these injustices and is fueled by the courageous testimony of those who live them. It is a bridge between their silenced realities and the halls of power where policy is made. It challenges European governments and institutions to move beyond rhetoric and implement the systemic reforms necessary to ensure that safety, justice, and dignity are not privileges, but guaranteed rights for all Romani women and girls.

With love and resistance,

The Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts.

[1] See Dalan report, available at <https://dalan.fund/whats-new/where-is-the-money-for-movements-in-central-eastern-europe-caucasus-and-central-and-north-asia-ceecna>

National report of Bosnia and Hercegovina

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Structural and Systemic Drivers:

Romani women in Bosnia and Herzegovina face deeply entrenched, intersecting systems of anti-Roma racism and sexism. Key structural drivers include:

Institutional discrimination

Discriminatory institutional practices across police, social protection, education, and healthcare systems, often shaped by stereotypes and lack of cultural competence.^[2] Absence of Roma representation within public institutions, including police, hospitals, centres for social work, and education bodies. Romani mediators operate mainly through NGO projects, not as state-supported positions.^[3] Weak implementation of existing laws, including those guaranteeing non-discriminatory access to healthcare, residence registration, preschool education access, and social housing.

Institutional tokenism

Exclusion from policy processes, with Romani women's organisations often treated as token participants or entirely excluded from legislative or reporting consultations.^[4]

Segregation

Segregated and inadequate housing solutions, often supported by donors, which ignore gender perspectives, reinforce social exclusion, and lack basic infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity).^[5]

Discriminatory discourses

Discriminatory discourse and institutional attitudes, including racial profiling, ethnic labelling in healthcare, resistance from authorities to address Roma-specific needs, and hostility toward terms preferred by Roma communities (“antiromizam” instead of “anticiganizam”).^[6]

Lack of institutional protection

Non-functional protection systems, especially regarding domestic violence, where institutions often fail to intervene, delay responses, or discourage Romani women from reporting. Legal and administrative barriers, including difficulties with residency registration and access to personal documents, which prevent Roma, especially women, from accessing health insurance, unemployment services, and social protection.

[2] See Fourth report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (adopted on 9 April 2024 / published on 25 June 2024) — Report and Government comments (English, French, Bosnian), available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-ecri-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680b0661f> page 24-27.

[3] Information provided by the participants at the workshop.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Manifestations of Violence and Discrimination:

Intersectional anti-Roma racism and gender inequality manifest in multiple forms of violence against Romani women:

Domestic violence

Is widespread, yet institutions routinely fail to intervene, discourage reporting, or return perpetrators home after minimal action. Women and their children are often left without protection, forcing NGOs to hide victims at personal risk.^[7]

Institutional violence in healthcare

Institutional violence, including degrading treatment in healthcare (e.g., multiple inquiries about ethnicity, refusal of services, discriminatory comments). Romani women frequently face barriers in accessing reproductive healthcare, including gynecologists located far from settlements and lack of transportation.

Psychological violence

Psychological violence, which participants described as pervasive but insufficiently recognized within official reports or institutional procedures.

Institutional and police negligence

Police negligence and stereotyping, where reports of violence or trafficking are dismissed as “community matters,” undermining victim safety and preventing early intervention.^[8] Violence in the context of human trafficking, including failures to protect trafficked children or provide safe accommodation, sometimes resulting in children being held in inappropriate facilities such as hotels or CSW offices.^[9]

Forced and/or early marriages

Forced or early marriages, especially among girls, which schools and institutions fail to detect or report despite clear warning signs.^[10]

School segregation

Segregation in education, including placement of Romani children in special schools without medical

[7] Participants testimony combined with Alternative Report of Nongovernmental Organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the GREVIO Group, December 2019, available at <https://rm.coe.int/alternative-report-of-ngo-from-the-bih-to-grevio-group/1680a179ae>.

[8] GREVIO, Baseline Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-baseline-evaluation-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680a8e5f1>, Alternative Report of Nongovernmental Organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the GREVIO Group, December 2019, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/alternative-report-of-ngo-from-the-bih-to-grevio-group/1680a179ae>.

[9] European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), “Bosnia: 31 Romani children found in ‘house of horrors’, police officer among eight arrested for trafficking,” 04 March 2025, available at: <https://www.errc.org/news/bosnia-31-romani-children-found-in-house-of-horrors-police-officer-among-eight-arrested-for-trafficking>.

[10] Fourth report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (adopted on 9 April 2024 / published on 25 June 2024) — Report and Government comments (English, French, Bosnian), available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-ecri-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680b0661f> page 24-27 and GREVIO, Baseline Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-baseline-evaluation-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680a8e5f1>.

justification, and transfer of Roma children from formal preschool to daily centres as part of donor-driven projects.^[11]

Shelters exclusion

Exclusion from safe housing, as many shelters refuse to accept Romani mothers with sons over 14 years old; some shelters accept Roma only temporarily due to perceived “high cost” of their stay.^[12] Lack of services for perpetrators, meaning women often must leave the home rather than the abuser being removed.

Lack of campaigns

Digital and public harassment, with no tailored campaigns addressing the forms of violence Romani women face.

Evidence and Data Landscape:

The data landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina is fragmented and outdated:

National monitoring bodies (ECRI, GREVIO, Istanbul Convention mechanisms) rely on old data, often from 2017, despite reporting periods extending to 2023.^[13] Ethnically disaggregated data on gender-based violence does not exist, including statistics on domestic violence, trafficking, early marriage, or access to services. Existing reports rarely disaggregate by gender within Roma communities, leading to invisibility of Romani women's experiences.

Most available data on Roma women comes from NGO-led research, notably in areas of preschool education, special schools, health insurance gaps, and discrimination in employment.^[14] Reports prepared by state institutions or international NGOs frequently reflect limited field knowledge and can misrepresent or oversimplify the situation. Lack of translation of key documents (e.g., GREVIO report and alternative reports) into Bosnian further limits participation and monitoring by local Roma women-led initiatives.^[15] Overall, the absence of comprehensive, current, and disaggregated data contributes to the systemic neglect of Romani women and obstructs evidence-based policymaking.^[16]

[13] Participants testimony.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Fourth report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (adopted on 9 April 2024 / published on 25 June 2024) — Report and Government comments (English, French, Bosnian), available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-ecri-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680b0661f> and GREVIO, Baseline Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-baseline-evaluation-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680a8e5f1>.

[16] See Romani Early Years Network (REYN), Young Roma children status in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Infographic, 2022, available at <https://www.reyn.eu/resources/infographic-young-roma-children-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>; Atlantska inicijativa, “Pristup i povjerenje Roma u institucije sigurnosti i pravosuđa u Bosni i Hercegovini,” 2021, <https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Pristup-i-povjerenje-Roma-u-institucije-sigurnosti-i-pravosuda-u-Bosni-i-Hercegovini.pdf>.

[17] GREVIO, Baseline Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-baseline-evaluation-report-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina/1680a8e5f1>.

[18] Conclusion from the workshop discussions among the participants and the national expert.

Recommendations from the Workshops

Recommendations for National Authorities and Institutions

1. Ensure stable employment of Romani mediators within police, healthcare, education, and social protection systems (not project-based).
2. Translate the GREVIO report and alternative reports into Bosnian and ensure Romani women's organisations are consulted in future monitoring cycles.
3. Ensure non-discriminatory access to healthcare, including transportation support for rural Romani women to reach gynaecologists and maternal health services.
4. Address the misuse of special schools and ensure Romani children are not placed there without proper assessment and on the basis of language difficulties; expand early childhood education access to overcome language barriers.
5. Guarantee safe house access for Romani survivors-victims, including mothers with sons over 14; increase capacity and develop culturally competent support services.
6. Establish specialised accommodation for child victims of trafficking or early/forced marriage, with trained professionals and clear institutional responsibilities.
7. Improve police responsiveness to reports of domestic violence and trafficking through mandatory training on antigypsyism, trauma-informed approaches, and survivor-victim protection.
8. Develop culturally appropriate prevention campaigns on GBV in Romani language(s), including audiovisual content.
9. Introduce economic empowerment programs for Romani women survivors, including access to employment, training, and social housing.
10. Ensure that both partners are included in housing contracts, and integrate gender-sensitive criteria into social housing allocation.
11. Introduce clear mechanisms for Roma NGO participation in legislative and policy processes, ensuring meaningful (not tokenistic) engagement.

Recommendations Related to Council of Europe Mechanisms (GREVIO, ECRI)

1. ECRI and GREVIO should require updated, disaggregated data on Roma women, specifically on domestic violence, trafficking, early marriage, and access to justice.
2. Monitoring bodies should conduct direct consultations with Romani women activists and ensure their experiences shape findings and recommendations.
3. GREVIO should strengthen its focus on prevention, psychological violence and barriers Romani women face in accessing justice, including police negligence and institutional discrimination.
4. ECRI should include a stronger analysis of segregated education, misuse of special schools, and donor-supported segregated housing initiatives.
5. GREVIO should examine child protection gaps, including the placement of trafficked or at-risk Romani children in inappropriate facilities.

6. Both mechanisms should integrate the need for Romani professionals within institutions as part of their recommendations to BiH.
7. ECRI should ensure its reports use terminology aligned with community preference (“antiromizam”).

National report of Hungary

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

The situation of Romani women and girls in Hungary is characterized by the interaction of anti-Roma racism, structural sexism and socio-economic inequality. Council of Europe monitoring bodies consistently describe Roma as the most marginalized group in Hungary, facing a ‘vicious circle’ of poor education, exclusion from the labor market, segregated housing and worse health outcomes than the majority population. Within this context, Romani women experience specific and intensified risks of gender-based violence and institutional discrimination that were powerfully confirmed by the testimonies shared during the workshop.

Structural and Systemic Drivers:

Anti-Roma racism

ECRI underlines that Roma “remain the most vulnerable and marginalised group in Hungary”^[17], with high poverty rates, widespread school segregation, and de facto residential segregation that also restricts access to quality health care and other services. Roma face an overall climate of intolerance and racist speech in politics and the media, including openly anti-Roma rhetoric and episodes of racist violence and intimidation by extremist groups. This hostile environment makes it harder and riskier for Romani women to seek help for violence, because they expect to be disbelieved, humiliated or further stigmatized when they come into contact with institutions. Workshop participants described this daily reality very clearly. One participant explained that when Romani women approach institutions, “*we meet people on the other side of the counter who don’t like Roma, who judge us by stereotypes and say things like ‘Roma sort it out inside the family’ and send us away.*” In their experience, institutions often reproduce anti-Roma racism instead of offering protection.

Gender inequality and patriarchal norms

GRETA notes that the CEDAW Committee has expressed concern about the persistence of stereotyped gender roles in Hungarian society and their particularly negative impact on Roma women, who are disproportionately affected by poverty and have limited access to health care, education and employment.^[18] Participants described how these structural patterns translate into everyday gender norms: men as heads of household and breadwinners, women as dependents and responsible for children and domestic work. Several women framed this as “generational trauma”, saying that Romani women and girls often times raised to believe that violence is “natural” in relationships and that “this is just how it is in our culture”.

[17] ECRI's Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 22, paragraph 22, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

[18] GRETA's Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Hungary, 2015, page 29, paragraph 115, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168070a5f3>

This internalisation of gendered and racialised stereotypes - often reinforced by outsiders who treat violence as “normal for Roma” - keeps many women trapped with perpetrators.

Socio-economic dependency and labor market exclusion

Roma face significantly worse outcomes in employment. ECRI reports that only 49% of Roma aged 20–64 are in paid work, compared to 69% of the general population, with Roma youth much more likely to be “NEET” (not in employment, education or training). There is a strong employment gap between Roma women and men, and Roma are over-represented in the public works scheme, which research shows tends to lock workers into low-skilled, precarious jobs rather than creating pathways to the open labor market.^[19] For Romani women, this translates into economic dependence on partners and extended family. As one participant put it, *“If Romani women leave their partner or report him, how will she survive? She is ‘just a mother’, She has no income and nowhere to go.”* Economic dependence is a structural driver of gender-based violence and a major barrier to leaving abusive relationships.

Inequalities in health and social protection

The Advisory Committee under the Framework Convention notes that Roma face significantly worse health outcomes than the majority population; for the 20 most common medical conditions, disease rates among Roma are at least double those of the general population, and up to ten times higher for some conditions. Economic barriers, the shortage of health professionals in disadvantaged regions and discriminatory practices in hospitals all limit access to care.^[20] ECRI similarly reports that Romani women are particularly vulnerable in access to health, and that there have been several cases of discrimination in maternity care, including a case in Miskolc where the Equal Treatment Authority found that a hospital had discriminated against a Romani woman on grounds of ethnicity.^[21] These forms of discrimination are themselves a kind of gendered and racialised violence, and they also discourage Roma women from asking for help when they are abused.

Weak protection frameworks and equality mechanisms

Hungary has signed but not ratified the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. GRETA and the CEDAW Committee have both underlined insufficient actions to address violence against women, including domestic violence. At the same time, institutional equality guarantees have been weakened: ECRI has called on the authorities to bring the new Equality Treatment Directorate fully into line with its standards on independent, well-resourced equality bodies and to raise public awareness of complaint mechanisms.^[22]

[19] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth opinion on Hungary, 2020, page 27, paragraph 188, available at <https://rmcoe.int/5th-op-hungary-en/16809eb484>

[20] ECRI's Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 26, paragraph 85, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

[21] ECRI's Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 26, paragraph 85, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

[22] ECRI's Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 7, paragraph 2, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

As an example, participants' accounts suggest that, in practice, Romani women experience the state's child protection and policing systems less as protection and more as threat: *"The system punishes you anyway. If you don't say anything, they can still take your child. If you do report, they go first for the children instead of the perpetrator."* This perception of institutional danger is a structural driver of under-reporting.

Manifestations of Violence and Discrimination:

Domestic and intimate-partner violence

Although there is no comprehensive ethnically disaggregated data on gender-based violence, all available evidence and the testimonies shared in the workshop indicate very high levels of domestic and intimate-partner violence against Romani women. GRETA explicitly links trafficking for sexual exploitation to "stereotypes and prejudice against women, and violence against women".^[23] Participants described a spectrum of violence - physical, sexual, psychological and economic - occurring primarily within the family, intimate relationships and in the public sphere as well. Women spoke of long-term abusive partnerships, control over their movements and money, threats against children and humiliation in front of others. One participant said simply: *"Everything that was said about abusive relationships is familiar to me, I have just left such a relationship, and it is familiar to many women I know."* Workshop participants highlighted that many Romani women have been socialized to see violence as "part of life" or "what love looks like" and feel shame about disclosing abuse to anyone outside the family. They also mentioned that many Romani women fear the perpetrator's retaliation and fear that authorities will remove their children rather than protect the family. Participants described cases where initial child protection interventions were followed by loss of trust in the mother when she returned to her partner, and later by drastic measures such as permanent child removal. As noted above, dependence on an abusive partner for housing and income makes reporting or leaving extremely risky.

Institutional violence and discrimination

Police and justice

Participants reported that Romani women experiencing domestic violence are often not taken seriously by the police, officers may refuse to register complaints, downplay the seriousness of the violence, or treat the situation as a "private matter" typical of Romani families. Several women described the practice of the police that Romani women were sent home without formal complaint or told implicitly that "you'll go back to him anyway", which matches GRETA's broader concern about insufficient implementation of victim-centred approaches and the need to train police and child-protection actors on domestic violence and trafficking.

[23] ECRI's Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 7, paragraph 2, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

Child protection

GRETA and the Advisory Committee note that Roma children are over-represented in child-protection institutions^[24] and that child removal is often linked to poverty and social exclusion rather than abuse per se. Participants confirmed this: they described a system in which economic hardship, overcrowded housing or a mother's continued relationship with a perpetrator are interpreted as grounds for child removal, without adequate support to address the underlying violence and poverty. One participant summarised the experience: *"The protection system burns out on us; after a few reports they see the mother as the problem and the answer is to take the children."*

Health care and reproductive rights

Discriminatory treatment in maternity and reproductive care is a specific form of institutional gender-based violence against Romani women. ECRI notes "several cases in Roma women's access to health, especially maternity care"^[25] The Advisory Committee points to harassment of Romani women in public hospitals^[26] and broader structural barriers to health care, with high levels of teenage pregnancy and poor maternal health outcomes linked to poverty and lack of health literacy.^[27] Participants named obstetric violence also as a key issue: humiliating treatment during childbirth, segregation in maternity wards, and being spoken to as if they were irresponsible or ignorant because they are Roma.

Education and exploitation of girls

The education system is another site where anti-Roma racism and sexism intersect. Romani girls are affected by widespread school segregation, misclassification into special needs schools and high drop-out rates. GRETA notes that the majority of child victims of trafficking in Hungary are reportedly from Romani communities, often from segregated areas where exploitation of girls and women in prostitution is widespread and pimping is normalised for boys. This creates a continuum between early school leaving, economic exclusion and sexual exploitation.^[28]

Public and online spaces

ECRI has documented a pattern of racist demonstrations, paramilitary "patrols" in Roma neighbourhoods and widespread anti-Roma hate speech in political discourse and online. These phenomena have a gendered impact: Roma women are targeted with sexualised slurs, and fear of racist attacks or harassment constrains their use of public space, especially at night or when travelling alone to services.

[24] GRETA's Evaluation report on access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings, 2024, page 51, paragraph 207, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/greta-2024-02-fgr-hun-en/1680aea2b9>

[25] See footnote 23.

[26] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth opinion on Hungary, 2020, page 11, paragraph 58, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/5th-op-hungary-en/16809eb484>

[27] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth opinion on Hungary, 2020, page 27, paragraph 189, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/5th-op-hungary-en/16809eb484>

[28] GRETA's Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Hungary, 2019, page 18, paragraph 64, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-hungary-2nd-evaluation-round-/168098f118>

Trafficking in human beings

GRETA estimates that Roma may represent at least 40% of victims of trafficking in human beings in Hungary and the great majority of those trafficked for sexual exploitation.^[29] Romani children are over-represented in institutional care, where they are at particular risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation. GRETA emphasises that domestic violence, gendered stereotypes, poverty and segregation all act as root causes that push Roma women and girls into trafficking situations.

Evidence and Data Landscape:

ECRI notes that hate-crime data are collected by police and prosecutors but published only as general crime statistics, “with no recording of bias motivation”^[30], data protection laws generally prevent the recording of ethnic origin or religion. The same problem applies to gender-based violence: national statistics on domestic violence do not systematically capture victims’ ethnic background, and there are no routine data on Romani women’s use of shelters, police protection or support services. Some indirect evidence does exist, like the National Social Inclusion Strategies^[31] and the Fifth Opinion under the Framework Convention document stark disparities in housing, employment and health, including much higher disease burdens, teenage pregnancy rates and barriers to hospital care among Roma. ECRI and GRETA also highlight that Romani women are at heightened risk of intersectional discrimination^[32] and are over-represented among victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Civil society research on Roma rights and Roma in state care provides case-based evidence of coercive practices and institutional racism in areas directly linked to gender based violence. However, as the Advisory Committee notes with regard to health, the absence of data makes it difficult to design and evaluate targeted remedial measures and to fully capture the scale of structural problems faced by Roma. Participants’ testimonies suggest that official figures, where they exist, significantly underestimate the prevalence of violence. They emphasized that under-reporting is driven by fear of child removal and institutional retaliation, prior experiences of discrimination and humiliation in police stations, hospitals and social services, lack of accessible information about rights and services and normalisation of violence within families and communities. As one participant summarised: *“We didn’t only learn about these issues, we lived them. Everything on the flipchart is our experience.”*

[29] GRETA’s Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Hungary, 2015, page 29, paragraph 114, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168070a5f3>

[30] ECRI’s Fifth report on Hungary, 2015, page 15, paragraph 25, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-hungary/16808b57e8>

[31] National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030, pages 126-127, available at: <https://szocialisportal.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Nemzeti-Tarsadalmi-Felzarkozasi-Strategia.pdf>

[32] ECRI’s Sixth report on Hungary, 2023, page 26, paragraph 86, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-hungary-translation-in-hungarian-/1680aa687b>

Recommendations from the Workshops

Recommendations for National Authorities and Institutions

1. Ensuring equal and dignified access to services

Participants agreed that Romani women face discrimination and humiliation when seeking help from health care, social services, police or child protection, often based on their name, address or appearance. Several recounted being treated as “not credible” or “not worth listening to” or being denied pain relief during childbirth because nurses believed they “deserved the pain”. To address this, the workshop participants called for:

- Mandatory anti-racism, gender-based violence and trauma-informed training for all frontline workers (police, midwives, nurses, social workers, child protection staff, etc).
- Romani health mediators and social mediators in hospitals, maternity wards, child protection services and local authorities to bridge communication gaps and prevent mistreatment.
- Clear institutional protocols to prevent racially segregated or degrading treatment in hospitals, especially in maternity care.

One participant described the need simply: *“We need professionals who don’t talk to us like children. Someone who understands where we come from.”*

2. Rebuilding trust in police and child Protection

Participants repeatedly stated that Romani women avoid reporting violence because institutions themselves feel dangerous. As one woman said: *“The system punishes you anyway - if you don’t report, they take your child, if you do report, they still go after your children first.”* Recommendations included:

- Mandatory registration of all gender-based violence reports and sanctions for officers who refuse to document cases or who act with bias.
- Independent complaints mechanisms for Romani women experiencing discrimination by police or social workers.
- Child protection reforms to ensure that poverty, overcrowding or stereotypical assumptions about Romani families are not treated as neglect.
- Shift from punitive child-removal practices to support-based interventions for mothers experiencing violence.

Participants stressed that “fear of losing our children is stronger than the fear of the abuser” - a reality that must be changed through policy and institutional culture.

3. Ending educational segregation and supporting Romani girls

During the workshop, across all working groups, education emerged as a priority area where anti-Roma racism and sexism combine to limit girls’ futures. Participants highlighted discriminatory school practices, lack of Romani history in curricula, and barriers such as menstruation poverty and early social expectations.

Recommendations included

- Eliminating school segregation, including reviewing the privileges of church-run schools that enable selection and exclusion.
- Restoring compulsory schooling to 18, to reduce early school-leaving among Romani girls.
- Introducing school bus systems to ensure access to non-segregated schools.
- Integrating Roma history, language and culture into national curricula and early childhood education.
- Ensuring free menstrual products in all schools.

As one participant observed: *“We go through school always as the ‘exception’ - told that we are not like the others. This doesn’t help anybody, it isolates us even more.”*

4. Addressing health care discrimination and obstetric violence

Participants shared testimonies of discriminatory and degrading treatment in maternity care, lack of informed consent, denial of pain relief, and humiliating comments about Romani women’s sexuality. Recommendations included:

- Creating independent oversight mechanisms for reproductive rights violations, including forced sterilisation, coercion, and discriminatory treatment.
- Clear protocols on informed consent, communicated in plain language.
- Recruiting and training Romani health professionals, doulas and advocates.
- Strengthening access to contraception and sexual-health services in segregated areas.

5. Economic empowerment and fair employment practices

Participants emphasised that economic dependence traps many women in abusive relationships. They also described systemic discrimination in hiring - *“We must always do double the work to be accepted”* - and the lack of flexible jobs for mothers. Recommendations included:

- Expanding employment and training programmes for Romani women linked to the open labour market (not temporary public works).
- Ensuring childcare and flexible working options for single mothers.
- Introducing anti-discrimination monitoring in hiring, especially in public institutions.
- Promoting Romani women’s representation in leadership and decision-making roles.

6. Strengthening data collection and monitoring

A central theme in all groups was the complete absence of reliable, disaggregated data on violence against Romani women. *“We have no measurements. Nothing can change if nothing is recorded,”* one participant said. Participants recommended:

- Developing anonymous, voluntary ethnic and gender data systems across police, health care, shelters and child protection.
- Creating standardised reporting templates for schools, hospitals and welfare services to capture discrimination and GBV incidents.

Ensuring that monitoring mechanisms use indicators that reflect the lived realities of Romani women.

Recommendations Related to Council of Europe Mechanisms (GREVIO, ECRI)

1. Integrate intersectional analysis into all monitoring cycles

Participants observed that existing reports often treat “Roma” or “women” separately, failing to capture the dual discrimination faced by Romani women. As one woman said, *“Everything that applies to Roma applies even harder to Roma women - but this is rarely written down.”* Recommendations included:

- GRETA, ECRI and the Advisory Committee should systematically include questions on Romani women in national questionnaires and country visits.
- GRETA should examine Romani women’s vulnerability to trafficking through a gender- and ethnicity-sensitive lens.

2. Strengthen cooperation with Roma women’s organisations

Participants highlighted that Romani women rarely have opportunities to influence European monitoring processes. They recommended:

- Direct invitations for Romani women’s groups to participate in country visits, consultations and roundtables.
- Financial and technical support to enable Roma-led shadow reporting.
- Using Romani women’s testimonies and knowledge to identify patterns of institutional discrimination that states often overlook.

3. Hold states accountable for anti-Roma racism as a barrier to GBV protection

Participants stressed that anti-Roma racism is not treated as a core gender-based violence issue, even though it shapes Romani women’s entire pathway to safety. They recommended:

- GREVIO and ECRI should explicitly evaluate racist institutional practices (child removal, police inaction, discriminatory health care) as forms of structural violence.
- Reports should include concrete benchmarks for improving access to shelters, policing responses and health care for Romani women.

4. Monitor reproductive rights violations

Women expressed strong concern that obstetric violence and coercive sterilisation remain under-reported. They recommended that:

- The Advisory Committee and GRETA include reproductive rights violations in their assessment of state compliance.
- ECRI address discrimination in reproductive health as part of its equality standards.

5. Support the development of robust, disaggregated data systems

Participants urged Council of Europe bodies to:

- Encourage member states to adopt safe, voluntary data collection models, such as those recommended by Kállai Ernő, former ombudsman on the protection of minority rights for measuring ethnic inequalities.

Ensure that future monitoring reports evaluate the quality of national data on Romani women and gender-based violence.

National report of Romania

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Structural and Systemic Drivers:

Legal level

Gender-based violence in Romania is governed by a fragmented system of laws that regulate different forms of harm through separate legal instruments: Law 202/2002 on equal opportunities between women and men, Law 217/2003 for preventing and combating domestic violence, and the Criminal Code. While each of these instruments addresses particular manifestations of violence, their division into discrete legal regimes has significant consequences. The compartmentalization of protections creates gaps between the forms of violence that are recognized and those that remain legally invisible, and it makes it difficult to address situations where violence arises at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and structural deprivation. This fragmentation reinforces the systemic invisibility of Roma women's experiences, which rarely fit neatly into one legislative framework, and the legal architecture itself becomes a structural driver that perpetuates Roma women's vulnerability by failing to capture the continuum of violence produced by both sexism and anti-Roma racism.

However, the law operates within a narrow relational framework, applying primarily to violence within the family. This limitation excludes a wide range of abuses affecting Roma women, including coercion from extended relatives, community-imposed early marriages, or economic exploitation by non-family actors. GREVIO has underlined that although Romanian domestic-violence legislation is formally well developed, its scope leaves certain patterns of violence, particularly those affecting marginalised communities, unaddressed.

Structural barriers

Lack of documentation, restricted mobility, poverty, and discriminatory policing—further limit Roma women's access to remedies. These barriers are not an accident of practice; they are built into the design of the legal framework, which assumes a degree of socio-economic stability and access to state institutions that many Roma women do not possess. Although Romania ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2016^[33], key forms of gender-based violence, such as forced marriage and forced sterilisation, remain unregulated in national criminal law.

[33] Law No. 30 of 17 March 2016 on the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, adopted in Istanbul on 11 May 2011, published in the Official Gazette No. 224 of 25 March 2016,

The Criminal Code does not explicitly criminalise coercing an adult or minor into marriage or cohabitation, nor does it address non-consensual sterilisation as a specific offence, despite the Convention's clear obligations under Articles 37 and 39. Only recently has a legislative proposal been introduced in Parliament to criminalise forced marriage and forced cohabitation (PL-x nr. 353/2025)^[34], which aims to fill this major legal gap by defining coercion into marriage as an act punishable by imprisonment. However, until its adoption, the legal system remains structurally misaligned with European human rights obligations.

Forced sterilization

Prohibited under Article 39 of the Istanbul Convention, is entirely unregulated by Romanian law. There is no specific criminal offence addressing non-consensual sterilisation, coercive medical practices, or reproductive violence. European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence—especially *V.C. v. Slovakia* (2011) and *I.G. and Others v. Slovakia* (2012)—has established that forced sterilisation violates Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and requires states to adopt effective criminal-law protection. Romania's failure to enact such legislation leaves victims without legal remedies and signals a profound normative gap concerning bodily autonomy. GREVIO has repeatedly identified the criminalisation of forced sterilisation as a mandatory requirement under the Convention; the absence of such provisions in Romania demonstrates a structural legal deficiency rather than a mere oversight.

Economic and psychological violence

Another significant dimension of gender-based violence that affects Roma women is economic and psychological violence, forms explicitly recognised in Article 5 of Law 217/2003 and defined in its implementing procedures. Economic violence includes restricting access to resources, controlling income or social benefits, preventing employment, or generating financial dependence. Psychological violence encompasses intimidation, humiliation, threats, manipulation, and social isolation. Roma women, who already face socio-economic marginalisation, lack of employment opportunities, and limited access to education, are particularly vulnerable to these forms of non-physical violence.

Human trafficking

It is regulated under Article 210 of the Criminal Code, and Romania has incorporated many of GRETA's recommendations in its anti-trafficking framework. However, a crucial dimension often overlooked is the legal treatment of child trafficking, covered separately under Article 211 of the Criminal Code. This provision criminalises the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of minors for purposes of exploitation, regardless of the means used. Child trafficking does not require proof of coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability; the victim's minority alone triggers criminal liability.

[34] The law proposal available at https://www.cdepro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015/proiect?cam=2&idp=22651

While Article 211 is strong on paper, it fails to address the structural vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect Roma children: lack of identification documents, school dropout, early marriage, informal labour, and community pressure. GRETA and ECRI have repeatedly noted the overrepresentation of Roma girls among trafficking victims, highlighting the systemic neglect in identifying early warning signs in high-risk communities. Romanian law imposes no preventive duties on authorities to monitor or mitigate known risk factors, resulting in a system that prosecutes exploitation after the fact rather than preventing it. For Roma girls, whose pathways into exploitation are shaped by both poverty and discriminatory institutional attitudes, the absence of structural prevention mechanisms reinforces the cycle of vulnerability.

Disincorporation of intersectionality

The common practice of interpreting Art. 2(6) OG 137/2000 by NCCD as addressing only “multiple discrimination” — understood as a simple accumulation of two separate discriminatory acts — is overly restrictive and inconsistent with the text, because it fragments victims’ experiences into discrete categories (e.g., one act of ethnic discrimination and another of gender discrimination) and obscures the qualitative harm that arises when these grounds operate simultaneously. Intersectional discrimination is not merely the sum of two violations but a unique, compounded form of harm shaped by overlapping stereotypes, structural exclusion, and social stigmatisation that cannot be separated into individual components. Recognising intersectionality is therefore not semantic refinement, but essential for accurately capturing the nature of the harm, interpreting evidence, and assigning responsibility in cases where discriminatory grounds interact inseparably, as is often the case for Roma women

Institutional framework invisibility

The **Government’s Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority 2022–2027**^[35] frames Roma inclusion as a cross-sectoral objective and acknowledges gender dimensions. However, it does not consistently prioritise “violence against Roma women,” lacking dedicated measures, indicators, and budgets to address this issue. While gender is recognised conceptually, concrete actions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against Roma women are absent.

[35] Government Decision no. 560/2022, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 450 of 5 May 2022, <http://www.anr.gov.ro/images/2022/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr-450Bis.pdf>

Similarly, the **National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Sexual Violence 2021-2030**^[36], the **National Strategy on Equal Opportunities and Prevention of Violence Against Women 2022-2027**^[37], the **National Strategy Against Human Trafficking (2024–2028)**^[38], the **National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children’s Rights 2023–2027**—measures are formulated in largely universal terms. For example, the **National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Sexual Violence** shows that, although it recognises forms of sexual violence such as early and forced marriage and forced sterilisation, its measures are framed in universal terms and do not include specific, operational actions targeting Roma women or other ethnic minorities. Across these frameworks, the absence of such data and tailored indicators renders Roma women statistically invisible and prevents institutions from monitoring their access to protection, support services, and justice. These policy gaps have practical consequences. Without explicit targets or disaggregated monitoring, local authorities rarely prioritise outreach or prevention activities in Roma communities; shelters and specialised services are not strategically located to reach communities with heightened needs; and training for police and prosecutors often remains generic rather than culturally or intersectionally competent.

Institutional practice

Preventing and combating gender-based violence fundamentally depends on the capacity of state institutions to ensure effective protection, real access to justice, and adequate support services for victims. In the case of Roma women, this institutional response is profoundly affected by a cumulative set of structural barriers resulting from the intersection of gender inequalities with ethnic discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation. These barriers are neither accidental nor isolated; they reflect systemic dysfunctions within public institutions, as repeatedly documented by international and European monitoring bodies such as GREVIO, FRA and Roma Civil Monitoring.^[39] In small communities, particularly in rural areas, institutional intervention in cases of domestic violence is deeply shaped by informal relations of social proximity. When police officers personally know perpetrators through kinship ties, neighbourhood relations, or shared social histories, professional impartiality is seriously undermined. For Roma women, this practice has an explicitly intersectional discriminatory effect: violence is simultaneously depoliticised as a “family matter” and ethicised as a “community issue.” As a result, Roma women are rendered legally invisible both as victims of gender-based violence and as rights-bearing subjects within the justice system. The institutional tolerance of violence thus reproduces gendered subordination while reinforcing ethnic marginalization.

[36] Decision No. 592/2021 on the approval of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Violence “SINERGIE” 2021-2030 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Violence “SINERGIE” 2021-2030 In force from June 18, 2021, published in the Official Gazette, Part I No. 608 of June 18, 2021. Form applicable on June 22, 2021, https://pcabucuresti.mplic.ro/violenta_sexuala.htm

[37] Decision No. 1,547 of December 19, 2022, published in the Official Gazette, Part I, no. 1,239 of December 22, 2022, <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr-1239Bis.pdf>

[38] Government Decision No. 861 of October 31, 2018, published in the Official Gazette, Part I, No. 949 of November 9, 2018, <https://antp.mai.gov.ro/docs/Despre%20Noi/Anexe/Strategia%20Nationala%20Impotriva%20Traficului%20de%20Persoane%202024-2028%20RO.pdf>

[39] GREVIO’s (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), Romania, GREVIO/Inf(2022)6, Adopted by GREVIO on 4 March 2022, Published on 16 June 2022, page 90, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/final-report-on-romania/1680a6e439>, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Roma women in nine EU Member States, 2019, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf, Roma Civil Monitoring – National Report on Romania, 2025 <https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/RCM2-2024-C1-Romania-FINAL-Romanian.pdf>

Mistrust in the police organisations

Trust in the police among Roma victims is severely eroded by repeated experiences of institutional inaction, minimisation of risk, and ineffective protection. The decision not to report violence is influenced not only by fear of retaliation but also by economic mechanisms that function in a structurally discriminatory manner.^[40]

Institutional racism

Institutional racism further amplifies these dynamics. Discriminatory attitudes, lack of empathy, and distrust toward Roma women's testimonies systematically affect how credibility, risk, and protection eligibility are assessed. Roma women are frequently perceived through racialised stereotypes that frame them as "provocative," "uncooperative," or culturally "accustomed to violence." These representations shift responsibility away from perpetrators and relocate it onto victims and their communities. In this way, structural discrimination is transformed into cultural essentialism, and state inaction is implicitly legitimised. Deficient professional training, combined with the lack of gender-sensitive and intercultural competence, institutionalises misinterpretation and victim-blaming. Although legal frameworks prescribe specialised training for professionals, in practice, such training remains sporadic, optional, and uneven. Without an intersectional framework, professionals fail to recognise how gender-based violence is shaped by ethnic discrimination and socio-economic vulnerability. Roma women are therefore assessed through individualised moral lenses rather than structural ones, leading to distorted risk evaluations, scepticism toward their testimonies, and delayed or denied protective measures. The FRA survey confirms that Roma women experience significantly higher rates of discrimination and institutional distrust in interactions with authorities.^[41]

GREVIO's Baseline Evaluation Report on Romania (2022) highlights that women in rural and marginalised communities, including Roma women, face major difficulties in accessing legal aid, especially due to bureaucratic requirements and the limited availability of specialised legal counselling. The report further notes that Romania lacks sufficient state-funded mechanisms enabling NGOs to provide legal representation for victims of domestic or sexual violence—leaving Roma women disproportionately unprotected. Roma Civil Monitor similarly documented that Roma women have "significantly lower access to legal assistance in cases of domestic violence and discrimination," largely due to inability to provide income documentation, poor institutional trust, and geographical isolation.^[42]

[40] Andreea Braga și Anca Nica—Everyone Knew! Violence against Roma and Non-Roma Women between the Normal and the Normative, 2017, <https://www.academia.edu/35084497>.

[41] Roma Civil Monitoring – National Report on Romania, 2025 <https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/RCM2-2024-C1-Romania-FINAL-Romanian.pdf>; Fair Trials – Uncovering Anti-Roma Discrimination in Criminal Justice, 2021 https://www.fairtrials.org/app/uploads/2021/11/FT-Roma_report-final.pdf

[42] Roma Civil Monitor, Civil Society Monitoring Report on Roma Inclusion in Romania, 2019; <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu>

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports that 68% of Roma live below the national at-risk-of-poverty threshold, and that no significant difference exists between Roma/Traveller women and Roma men in this regard—illustrating a level of socio-economic exclusion of Roma women so severe that it directly limits access to legal services.^[43]

Public discourse

IRES in 2020 illustrated that Roma are perceived by 70% of the population as inherently “uncivilised”, “criminal” or “parasites”, and \ such imagery is normalised in media, politics and everyday speech.^[44] The FRA Roma women survey documents that Roma women face a double burden of racism and sexism, with high levels of poverty, housing deprivation, and barriers to healthcare and education; these conditions increase exposure to GBV while limiting exit options and access to support, whereas Active Watch reports on intolerant and hate speech show that Roma and women are recurrent targets in monitored media and political discourse, indicating that negative public narratives are persistent and normalised. Within this context, Roma women are often portrayed in media and public statements as culturally “responsible” for early pregnancies, as irresponsible mothers, or as members of a community that “burdens” public services.^[45] They are simultaneously constructed as “Roma” (racialised, collectively suspected) and as “women” (subject to misogynistic and sexualised representations). This intersectional lens is crucial for understanding why Roma women victims of GBV face heightened disbelief, victim-blaming and public shaming compared to other women.

Manifestations of Violence and Discrimination:

Roma women in Romania are situated at the intersection of multiple, overlapping systems of inequality shaped by ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and spatial marginalisation. These structural inequalities do not operate independently but reinforce one another, creating conditions in which discrimination becomes systemic and, in many contexts, normalised. Poverty, limited access to education and employment, segregated living conditions, and weak institutional protection significantly increase exposure to violence. Roma women living in rural or peri-urban segregated settlements, for example, often experience severe social isolation alongside restricted access to healthcare, education, employment, and protection services.^[46]

[44] IRES, Perception of Roma during COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020, <https://ires.ro/articol/403/percep-ia-asupra-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-de-covid-19>,

[45] See Decision NOCD 69/2013, the sanctioned speech explicitly combined gendered and racialised hatred: Roma women were portrayed as “social burdens,” with open calls for sterilisation. This is a stark example of how public discourse can reduce Roma women’s humanity, denying them bodily autonomy, and signalling that they are undeserving of reproductive or social rights, available at <https://www.cncd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/HOTARAREA-69-2013.pdf>. Decision 117/2014 shows that high-ranking political figures have invoked harmful stereotypes about Roma — framing an entire ethnic group as criminal or lazy — which normalises discrimination in public institutions and influences how Roma people are treated in practice, available at <https://www.cncd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/HOTARAREA-117-2014.pdf>

[46] Ibid 32

An intersectional perspective is essential for understanding these realities. The discrimination faced by Roma women cannot be analysed solely as sexism or solely as racism; rather, these systems interact to produce distinct forms of vulnerability that differ both from those experienced by non-Roma women and from those faced by Roma men. Patriarchal norms within some communities intersect with structural racism and institutional neglect, reinforcing cycles of dependency, exclusion, and exposure to violence.

Domestic Violence: Physical, Sexual, Economic, and Psychological Abuse

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive and underreported forms of violence affecting Roma women. Research consistently links heightened vulnerability to structural factors such as poverty, overcrowded housing, low educational attainment, and institutional discrimination.^[47] Psychological violence is widespread and deeply intertwined with physical and economic abuse. Specifically, Roma women report constant surveillance, verbal humiliation, threats, and intimidation, including threats of abandonment or removal of their children. In documented cases, abusive partners have prevented women from seeking medical care or enrolling children in school, effectively extending coercive control across multiple dimensions of life.^[48] Structural barriers compound these risks. Roma women attempting to flee domestic violence often encounter serious obstacles in accessing shelters due to geographic distance, lack of culturally sensitive services, and discriminatory treatment within existing shelters. Some survivors report being treated with suspicion or hostility by staff or other residents. Domestic violence is still framed by some professionals as a “cultural issue” in Roma communities, or as a private family matter.

Forced Marriage/ Cohabitation between children

This form of violence affecting Roma girls in Romania is most often informal, taking place outside any official legal framework and therefore remaining largely invisible to state authorities. Girls are disproportionately affected compared to boys, reflecting the deeply gendered nature of this practice. Coercion is exercised through multiple forms of psychological pressure, control, and manipulation. These may include threats, intimidation, blackmail, emotional conditioning, promises of protection or material security, deception, and the use of gifts or symbolic exchanges that minors are often unable to fully understand or refuse.^[49] Family members and, in some cases, broader community networks play a key role in exerting pressure, reinforcing obedience through honour-based norms, fear of stigma, and social exclusion. Importantly, early and forced marriage should not be understood as a single event, but rather as a gradual process of coercion, during which resistance is systematically eroded over time.^[50]

[47] Ioana Vrabiescu, Phenja: Sisterhood Between Women Against Gender-Based Violence, 2016, Page 17-23

[48] Ibid.

[49] Carmen Gheorghe and Cerasela Banica, Intervention Handbook for Cases of Child/Forced Marriages -Methods of Intervention and Recommendations, 2024, <https://e-romnja.ro/download/2991/?tmstv=1764768878>.

[50] Ibid.

Forced Sterilisation

There was documented only one case in Romania in the early 2000s in which a Roma woman was sterilised without informed consent during Caesarean sections. However, there is no other evidence indicating that forced sterilisation has been practised as a systematic or widespread form of violence in Romania over the past three decades, and no recent official data or civil society research confirm the continuation of such practices.

Harassment and Violence in Public and Online Spaces

Roma women are frequently exposed to harassment in public spaces, workplaces, and online environments. Specifically, FRA reported that 27% of Roma women experienced, at least once, some form of harassment. Thus, public harassment includes racial slurs, sexualised insults, denial of services in shops, surveillance in markets, and discriminatory treatment by security personnel. These experiences discourage public participation, and limit access to education and employment. Online harassment further amplifies public discrimination.

Economic and Psychological Violence beyond the Household

Economic and psychological violence extends far beyond intimate relationships into workplaces, institutions, and social services. Limited access to formal employment, discriminatory hiring practices, and segregated education restrict Roma women's economic independence and reinforce dependency on informal networks or abusive partners. 33% of Roma women said that they have experienced discrimination because of their ethnic origin, or skin colour, when looking for work.^[51] Psychological violence is institutionalised through chronic discrimination, stereotyping, and social exclusion by public authorities and service providers.

Institutional Violence: Police, Healthcare, and Social Services

Institutional violence manifests through discriminatory practices, procedural negligence, and unequal access to justice, healthcare, and social protection. Roma women encounter obstacles at every stage of reporting domestic or sexual violence, from dismissive police responses to inadequate protection measures.^[52] In healthcare, Roma women continue to face denial of care, segregated treatment, verbal harassment, and coercive procedures. Social services often presume parental neglect, moral deficiency, or incapacity among Roma women while simultaneously limiting access to assistance, reinforcing surveillance rather than support. Law enforcement failures to properly register complaints or enforce protection orders further entrench exposure to violence.^[53]

[51] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma women in nine EU Member States, 2019, page 35, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf.

[52] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022). Roma Survey 2021: Main Results, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-2021-main-results>. Council of Europe (2022). Research on the Barriers of Roma Women's Access to Justice in Four Countries. <https://rm.coe.int/research-on-the-barriers-of-roma-women-s-access-to-justice-in-four-cou/1680a7cd27>.

[53] Ibid.

Roma women in Romania experience violence across domestic, public, digital, economic, reproductive, and institutional spheres. Domestic abuse, early and forced marriage, forced sterilisation, harassment, and economic and psychological oppression together form a continuum of racialised and gendered violence.

Evidence and Data Landscape:

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a major human rights and public health concern in Romania, with national and European-level data indicating high prevalence rates of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women. While Romania produces regular administrative data on domestic violence through its social assistance, police, and justice systems, these datasets are generally disaggregated only by sex and age. Ethnic disaggregation is not systematically applied, which renders Roma women largely invisible in official GBV statistics at population level and makes it impossible to assess the full scale of ethnically differentiated risks. Available data on forced marriage/cohabitation between children do not exist because ethnicity is systematically recorded in civil or criminal registries, but rather because this form of violence has received sustained and targeted attention from national and international NGOs and research bodies. It is one of the few harmful practices affecting Roma women that has been consistently researched through dedicated sociological and human rights studies, including those carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

The EU-MIDIS II survey confirms that in Romania specifically, 39% of Roma women were married before the age of 18, compared to 13% of Roma men, placing the country among the highest in the EU for early marriage among Roma women. Moreover, 26% of Roma women aged 16–24 were already married before the age of 18, demonstrating that the practice is not only historical but continues to affect younger generations.^[54] Forced cohabitation between children is internationally recognised as a form of forced marriage and a harmful practice that increases women's long-term vulnerability to intimate partner violence, school dropout, economic dependency, and social exclusion. In terms of officially compiled national figures related to early and forced marriage, between 2015 and 2019 a total of 2,775 underage girls were recorded as married in Romania, compared to only 40 underage boys, highlighting the deeply gendered nature of this practice.

[54] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma women in nine EU Member States, 2019, page 23, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf.

However, these figures are not disaggregated by ethnicity and therefore cannot be used to determine how many of these cases involve Roma girls. Public debates on forced and early marriage are frequently framed through ethnic stereotypes and are often associated almost exclusively with Roma communities. Yet national-level administrative evidence shows that the phenomenon is wider, affecting girls from different social backgrounds and regions, and must be understood as a harmful practice that becomes culturally justified in certain contexts while still constituting a form of abuse and a violation of children's rights.^[55]

Data on domestic violence are available because this form of violence is explicitly regulated by national legislation and linked to mandatory reporting and intervention systems within social services. The National Agency for Equal Chances currently provides the only official insight into domestic violence affecting Roma women through administrative records of beneficiaries of protection services. According to government data submitted for international reporting, in 2018, 1,569 Roma women were registered as victims of domestic violence, representing 46.5% of all victims for whom ethnicity was recorded. In the first half of 2019, 611 Roma women were identified as victims, accounting for 35% of victims with registered ethnicity. Women and girls represented around 60% of all domestic-violence victims in the system, with a very high proportion being minors. These figures point to a severe overrepresentation of Roma women among identified domestic-violence beneficiaries. At the same time, a 2022 regional study by the Council of Europe on barriers to Roma women's access to justice found that 80% of interviewed Roma women firmly condemned domestic violence, and that all respondents reported that the number of complaints related to violence in Roma families is increasing, indicating growing awareness and readiness to seek support despite persistent institutional barriers.^[56]

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^{55]} Data were provided by the Ministry of the Interior at the request of the Roma women's organisation E-Romnja,

^[56] Research on the barriers of Roma Women's access to justice in four Countries, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania; Council of Europe, 2022. Author of Final Research Report: Bojana Netkova. Authors of National Reports: Maria Metodjeva (Bulgaria), Christos Iliadis (Greece), Tiziana Barrucci (Italy), and Crina Marina Muresanu (Romania). Available in English at: <https://rm.coe.int/research-on-the-barriers-of-roma-women-s-access-to-justicein-four-cou/1680a7cd27>.

Recommendations from the Workshops

Recommendations for National Authorities and Institutions

1. Romanian Parliament

- Amend OG 137/2000 to explicitly recognise intersectional discrimination, enabling claims based on combined grounds.
- Adopt the law proposal on forced marriage and forced cohabitation and criminalise forced sterilisation in alignment with the Istanbul Convention.

2. Public Ministry

- Adopt binding guidelines requiring prosecutors to treat forced marriage/cohabitation as GBV and child abuse, not cultural practice, and to initiate ex officio investigations where necessary.
- Integrate intersectional discrimination analysis in prosecutorial practice, adjusting credibility assessments and evidentiary expectations for Roma victims.
- Create specialised GBV focal points for cases involving Roma communities to ensure consistent application of protection measures.
- Review cases where police failed to intervene or improperly handled complaints by Roma women and transmit disciplinary referrals when patterns of negligence or discrimination are identified.
- Offer ongoing training on anti-Roma racism, trauma-informed interviewing, credibility assessment, and investigation methods for forced marriage/cohabitation.

3. Ministry of Internal Affairs

- To adopt a binding national guideline for police intervention on domestic violence and forced marriage/cohabitation, explicitly incorporating the E-Romnja intervention model. This guideline must define risk indicators, require immediate registration of all complaints, prohibit informal mediation, and mandate coordination with DGASPC and prosecutors.
- To address documented institutional inaction in small communities, MAI should create mechanisms for external oversight when officers have personal or social ties to perpetrators, including mandatory reassignment of cases to impartial personnel.
- To institutionalise mandatory training for all police officers on anti-Roma racism, intersectional discrimination, GBV intervention, coercive control and legal duties in relation to forced marriage/cohabitation. Training should use real cases illustrating discriminatory non-intervention and minimisation.
- To establish a national reporting and monitoring system for police failures, including unregistered complaints, delayed responses, discriminatory language, and refusal to intervene. Inspectorates must report these systematically, and MAI must ensure disciplinary follow-up.
- To ensure the protection of health and school mediators who collaborate with police, through confidential channels, anonymity guarantees and institutional support during interventions in high-risk communities.

4. Ministry of Health

- Train medical staff on anti-racism, informed consent, trauma awareness and GBV risk identification, including indicators of forced marriage/cohabitation.
- Train Roma health mediators specifically on GBV prevention, forced marriage/cohabitation detection, safe referral, confidentiality and survivor-centred communication.
- Protect mediators through recognised confidential reporting channels and institutional backing.
- Ensure Roma women have equal access to reproductive health, emergency care and mental health support following violence.

5. Ministry of Education

- Train teachers, counsellors and school mediators to identify signs of GBV and forced marriage/cohabitation and to follow mandatory reporting obligations.
- Implement early-warning procedures for absenteeism, sudden withdrawal, behavioural changes and early pregnancy.
- Provide safety mechanisms (confidential reporting, supervisor protection) for school mediators.
- Promote awareness programmes in schools on GBV, rights and gender equality tailored to Roma pupils and families.

6. National Agency for Roma (NAR)

- Operationalise intersectional discrimination across the Roma Inclusion Strategy by requiring all ministries and local authorities to design, implement and evaluate measures using practical intersectional assessment tools (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, territorial marginalisation).
- Develop practical guidance on intersectionality: institutional checklists, templates for budget justification, monitoring indicators, and reporting structures.
- Ensure intersectionality is applied in budgeting, not just policy language, requiring ministries to justify dedicated allocations addressing intersecting inequalities.
- Establish a National Coordination Mechanism on Forced Marriage/Cohabitation, together with ANES, ANPDCA, MAI, MoE and MoH, defining roles, timelines and intervention procedures.
- Ensure Roma health mediators (Ministry of Health) and school mediators (Ministry of Education) receive structured training on GBV awareness, detecting signs of forced marriage/cohabitation, safe referral, confidentiality, survivor-centred communication, and anti-discrimination norms.
- Create protection protocols for mediators to safely report cases without risking retaliation within their communities, ensuring anonymity and institutional backing.
- Lead, together with INS and ANES, the development of a national methodology for voluntary, confidential ethnicity- and intersectionality-disaggregated GBV data, with clear institutional roles and safeguards.

7. National Agency for Equal Opportunities (ANES)

- Make intersectionality operational by requiring all GBV policies to include targeted measures for Roma women, intersectional indicators, and risk-assessment tools.
- Create a dedicated national fund for NGOs providing GBV services, including counselling, community outreach, empowerment programmes and free legal assistance for Roma women, ensuring continuity beyond project cycles.
- Collaborate with the National Bar Association (UNBR) and Ministry of Justice to expand and simplify access to state-funded legal aid for Roma women victims of GBV and forced marriage/cohabitation.
- Develop, together with INS and ANR, a national institutional mechanism for ethnicity- and gender-disaggregated GBV data, including methodology, reporting templates, privacy guidelines and coordinated responsibilities.
- Monitor discrimination within GBV services and require corrective action where Roma women's credibility is questioned or access is obstructed.
- Coordinate national awareness campaigns targeted at Roma women and girls on GBV, rights, protection orders, shelters, and available services.

8. National agency for Child protection

- Develop a national protocol on forced marriage/cohabitation, defining responsibilities for schools, mediators, DGASPC, police and prosecutors, including clear steps for emergency intervention.
- Equip DGASPC with practical tools for intersectional risk assessment, including poverty, segregation, institutional mistrust and gender inequalities.
- Ensure Roma minors and mothers have guaranteed access to free legal representation, psychological support, and safe accommodation.
- Provide mediators and frontline workers with institutional protection measures, including confidentiality, safety protocols and supervisory support when reporting cases.
- Monitor DGASPC interventions in Roma communities and publish regular reviews identifying gaps and corrective actions.

9. Audiovisual National Council (CNA)

- Monitor and sanction racist and sexist narratives, especially those portraying forced marriage/cohabitation as “cultural” and naturalising violence.
- Promote ethical journalism standards regarding Roma women.
- Support national awareness campaigns on GBV and Roma women's rights.

10. County Councils

- Secure multiannual funding for shelters, counselling centres and mobile GBV services accessible to Roma communities.
- Provide grant schemes for NGOs offering free legal representation and support to Roma victims.
- Support community-level GBV awareness programmes co-developed with Roma women's organisations.

11. County Police Inspectorates

- To implement the MAI guideline on domestic violence and forced marriage/cohabitation in all units through mandatory training and internal audits.
- Designate specialised GBV officers trained in Roma community engagement and intersectional risk assessment.
- Create rapid-response mechanisms involving DGASPC, mediators and shelters for urgent cases.
- Monitor discriminatory conduct or refusal to intervene and report it to MAI for disciplinary action.

12. DGASPC (County Child Protection Directorates)

- Use intersectional risk-assessment tools in all cases involving Roma girls, including forced marriage/cohabitation and domestic violence.
- Establish safe cooperation channels with health and school mediators for early identification and referral.
- Coordinate closely with police and prosecutors to implement timely protective measures.
- Intervene when staff minimise violence, culturalise abuse or dismiss Roma women's credibility.

Recommendations Related to Council of Europe Mechanisms (GREVIO, ECRI)

1. GREVIO

- Should urge Romania to assess discriminatory practices across the justice chain in cases involving Roma women, including failures to register complaints, credibility bias, and inadequate enforcement of protection measures. This assessment should lead to enforceable disciplinary mechanisms and strengthened accountability for police, prosecutors and judges.
- Should strongly encourage Romania to ensure effective and accessible legal assistance for Roma women by reforming the legal aid system and establishing stable funding for specialised NGOs offering legal counselling and representation in GBV cases.
- Should urge Romania to adopt a unified national protocol on forced marriage/cohabitation, ensuring consistent identification, reporting and intervention across police, child protection, healthcare and education, accompanied by specialised training for judicial and frontline staff.
- Should strongly encourage Romania to address institutional racism and anti-Roma racism through mandatory training and institutional mechanisms designed to identify and correct discriminatory behaviour affecting Roma women victims.

- Should urge Romania to establish a national system for intersectionally disaggregated data on GBV, collecting voluntary information on ethnicity to enable accurate monitoring of access to justice and services for Roma women.
- Should encourage Romania to expand and ensure equitable access to GBV services in rural and segregated areas and guarantee non-discriminatory admission to shelters, counselling and protection mechanisms.
- Should also recommend that Romania strengthen child protection responses for Roma girls at risk of violence and combat harmful public discourse that reinforces anti-Roma racism and sexism.
- Should encourage Romania to institutionalise the participation of Roma women's organisations in GBV policy design, implementation and monitoring, supported by stable and predictable funding.

2. ECRI

- ECRI should systematically integrate civil society, Roma women's organisations, independent researchers, and community-based data into its assessments, giving them equal weight to state-reported information, especially where state data are incomplete, ethnicity-blind, or contested.
- ECRI should include dedicated, explicit recommendations addressing Roma women, reflecting their distinct experiences of racism and gender discrimination, rather than subsuming them under general Roma policies or general gender policies.
- ECRI should ensure that discrimination experienced by Roma women is not treated in fragmented policy silos, but analysed through a coherent framework connecting racism, sexism, poverty, and institutional barriers, with clear links across sections of its reports.
- ECRI should expand its monitoring to include institutional racism within police, courts, healthcare, education and social services, examining how anti-Roma stereotypes affect decision-making, service provision, and the credibility of Roma women.
- ECRI should adopt an explicit intersectional methodology for its monitoring cycles, ensuring that all sections—legislation, policing, services, hate speech, child protection—assess how gender and ethnicity interact to shape discrimination against Roma women

National report of Spain

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Structural and Systemic Drivers:

The Roma population in Spain, as in the rest of Europe, continues to exhibit high rates of poverty and exclusion. Using the AROPE rate indicator, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano revealed in its 2018 comparative study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain regarding employment and poverty that 92% of the Roma population is at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion and 46% are in a situation of extreme poverty.^[57] The VIII Foessa Report on the Social Situation of the Roma Population in Spain^[58] already pointed out that this group reaffirmed its condition of special vulnerability to social exclusion, with basic deprivation affecting 63.3% of Roma households. The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty alerted about the situation of the Roma population and called for an emergency response during his visit to Spain just before the pandemic in February 2020.

Structural anti-Roma racism

Is a persistent form of racism that has existed since the very arrival of the Roma people in Europe over 600 years ago. It is systematic, as it is observed in all social strata and spheres, and particularly violent, recurrent, and trivialized. True to this reality, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) defines anti-Roma racism as an ideology based on racial superiority, a form of dehumanization, and institutional racism. It manifests through negative stereotypes, hate speech, and historical discrimination that perpetuate intolerance and violate human rights. Beyond definitions, the reality of anti-Roma racism in the Spanish context is evidenced by some of the following data: In total, 17% of the Roma population over 16 have completed secondary education (ESO) or higher, compared to almost 80% of the general population.^[59] In Spain, 52% of Roma people are unemployed, compared to 14.4% of the general population.^[60] Roma women are the most disadvantaged, with only 38.5% of them being active, compared to 76.2% of Roma men. The average monthly salary received by Roma people is €754, compared to a monthly salary of €1,216 for the general population. The life expectancy of Roma people in Spain is significantly lower than that of the general population, being between 9 and 15 years below the national average. This gap worsens in the case of Roma women, whose life expectancy is even lower than that of Roma men and non-Roma women.

[57] Estudio comparado sobre la situación de la población gitana en España en relación al empleo y la pobreza 2018 (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019) <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/la-fundacion-secretariado-gitano-presenta-su-estudio-comparado-sobre-la-situacion-de-la-poblacion-gitana-en-espana-en-relacion-al-empleo-y-la-pobreza-2018>

[58] Fundación Foessa: https://www.foessa.es/main-files/uploads/sites/16/2019/06/Informe-FOESSA-2019_web-completo.pdf

[59] Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2023: <https://www.gitanos.org/quehacemos/areas/empleo-y-formacion-profesional/situacion.htm>
Fundación Secretariado Gitano: <https://www.gitanos.org/quehacemos/areas/empleo-y-formacion-profesional/en-cifras.html>

The incidence of chronic diseases among Roma people is higher than in the rest of the population, with obesity being one of the most significant health problems. Obesity affects Roma women to a greater extent, with 26% compared to 15% of the total Spanish female population. Around 2% of the Roma population, that is, more than 15,000 people, live in extreme conditions, such as in shantytowns without access to running water, which increases disease and mortality.^[61] All these data on access to rights are aggravated in the case of Roma women, who show greater difficulty than Roma men and non-Roma women in the full exercise of the right to income, housing, health, or the use of public space.

Manifestations of Violence and Discrimination:

To understand how this unequal access of Roma women to the full exercise of fundamental rights operates, it is necessary to read it from the intersection of class, gender, and race.

Gendered antigypsyism

Roma women are subject to inequalities caused by sexism, poverty, and, in addition, by the effects of anti-Roma racism. The combination of these axes of discrimination has been conceptualized under the expression gendered antigypsyism. If one wishes to address situations of inequality in access to rights affecting Roma women, this intersectional approach that points to the racist, patriarchal, and classist structures of society must be considered. Gender-based violence against Roma women is also a phenomenon that must be addressed from this intersectional and structural perspective. Below are three examples of systemic factors that perpetuate the intersection of anti-Roma racism and sexism in Spain: racist discourses reproduced in social space and the media; gendered anti-Roma racism in the Courts; and the criminalization of Roma women in supermarkets and shopping centers.

Discourses that Sustain Gendered anti-Roma racism

Some of the discourses that perpetuate the intersection of anti-Roma racism and sexism are those collected in the Intervention Model for Gender-Based Violence with Roma Women developed by the Federation of Roma Women's Associations, FAKALI^[62]:

- Roma women do not want to integrate, they do not progress.
- Roma women are more sexist.
- Roma culture is a marginal culture.
- Hypersexualization of the lives and bodies of Roma women and romantic love.
- Roma women only aspire to marriage and motherhood.
- Roma women are illiterate and do not study.
- Roma women do not work.
- Roma women are criminals.
- Roma women abuse or live off social assistance.

[61] Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2015 https://www.gitanos.org/upload/19/29/R-E-espan-e-mapa_sobreviviendayPG.pdf

[62] file:///C:/Users/pasto/Downloads/MODELO-DE-INTERVENCION-EN-VIOLENCIA-DE-GENERO-CON-MUJERES-GITANAS-A5.pdf

Gendered anti-Roma racism in the courts

As an example of institutional practice of gender anti-Roma racism, it is necessary to refer to that which occurs in the Courts because it directly affects situations of sexual or domestic violence that may affect Roma women. In 2024, Spanish courts issued two judicial sentences on sexual assaults of minors, in which the sentences were reduced or exempted because both the victim and the aggressor were Roma persons.

The first case refers to a sentence issued by the Provincial Court of León, which applied a mitigating factor to a 21-year-old aggressor who had had at least three penetrative sexual relations with a 12-year-old minor, resulting in pregnancies at ages 12, 13, and 15. The facts occurred in a cohabitation relationship similar to marital life, and the sentence was reduced to 8 years and 9 months in prison out of the 37 requested by the prosecution for various crimes, including sexual assault. The Court recognized that, "although there is a significant age difference between the victim and the defendant," it must not be "forgotten that, in Roma culture, couples unite at very early ages" and the victim "stated that, despite her young age, she knew what sexual relations were and their consequences and consented to these relations knowing their importance, as in her culture girls her age usually start to pair up and have children."

In the second case, the Provincial Court of Ciudad Real acquitted a 20-year-old man of a crime of continued sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl with whom he maintained a cohabitation similar to marital life and whom he left pregnant with twins. The sentence considers that the relations were consensual and that there was no great age difference between victim and aggressor. According to the Court, "there is no controversy" that this "relationship is framed within the cultural and social sphere of the Roma community, where marriages of very young people are frequent."

The exonerating and mitigating factors applied in these cases were not based on psychological reports on the victim and aggressor but simply on stereotyped and racist subjectivities, such as the false belief in the normality of marriages of 12-year-old girls in the Roma community.

Gendered anti-Roma racism in Supermarkets and Shopping Centers

The Association of Roma Women of Euskadi (AMUGE) in October 2019 reported two security guards at a shopping center who harassed thirteen girls between 12 and 14 years old and three educators leaving the cinema. As a result of this situation, they organized a testing in supermarkets and shopping centers in Bizkaia, as one of the actions of their project "Anti-Roma racism: Denunciation and Visibility from a Feminist and Intersectional Perspective"^[63]. The result of this investigation was that in 80% of the analyzed cases, Roma women suffered persecution, verbal accusations, or intimidating looks from security guards. This type of discriminatory treatment occurs in public space and with high social connivance. This discrimination is based on a historical racist stereotype about the Roma community: "Gypsies steal." But likewise, it is based on a gender stereotype insofar as women are the providers of food and goods for the sustenance of their families' lives, therefore: "Roma women steal in supermarkets." And finally, a class stereotype insofar as it is assumed that Roma people voluntarily choose not to work and therefore have no income, preferring welfare or theft: "Roma people do not want to work and prefer to steal."

Evidence and Data Landscape:

There are no data on Roma women in the statistical bulletins of the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ), while reference is made to the foreign origin of the aggressor and the victim. The latest macro-survey against Gender-Based Violence conducted by the Government of Spain in 2019 in its fourth block again analyzes in detail what happens to women who may be especially vulnerable to violence and includes: women with disabilities, young women aged 16 to 24, women aged 65 or over, women born abroad, and women living in small municipalities. However, the factor related to ethnic affiliation to study its specific impact regarding gender-based violence against Roma women was not considered for its preparation. All research work with a Roma perspective considers it necessary to develop approximate studies on how gender-based violence develops and what particular elements can describe the situation of Roma women, situations of inequality, and gender-based violence. To implement specific preventive and action measures, it is essential to obtain greater scientific knowledge about the experiences in this regard of Roma women, their prevalence rates, and behavior when seeking help. To this end, it is proposed that the factor of ethnic belonging or Roma condition be introduced in future compilations and studies to overcome this epistemological void or silence.

[63] <https://amuge.org/informe-del-testing-nos-persiguen/>

Recommendations from the Workshops

The participants did not identify the main cause of the underreporting of gender-based violence cases among Roma women as a lack of knowledge by these women about institutional reporting procedures. In the opinion of the participants, the main causes of this underreporting are the following two:

- The existence of internal protocols within the community for the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence.
- The anti-Roma bias of professionals in social services for victims of gender-based violence.

It must be considered that internal procedures exist within Roma communities to prevent and eradicate situations of gender-based violence. Until now, these internal procedures have not been institutionally recognized. Even the action of administrations in cases of Roma women victims of gender-based violence is antagonistic to these internal procedures of the Roma community. For example, administration rules are established as a protective measure for women to shelter in houses and centers outside their communities. However, the own norms of the Roma community have as a general principle to preserve the woman's stay within her extended family environment, and it is the aggressor who must move away. The community is involved in the guarantees for the aggressor to move away. It is not mediation; the involved community is the guarantor of the cessation of violence and not a mediator between the parties. In the first report of gender-based violence by a Roma woman to her community, the mediators ("arregladores") ask her if she wants him to stay in the community or not. If it recurs, it is the woman who decides if he is expelled or not.

The Roma women who reach the victim care services for gender-based violence are those in the most extreme situations, who have lost the support capacity of their environment. Hence, one of the most requested resources during victim care is access to housing where they can feel safe and live with their children. On the other hand, the anti-Roma bias of professionals in Social Services for victim care acts as a significant obstacle for Roma women to initiate reporting procedures in cases of gender-based violence. In cases where Roma women do not go to their own community to eradicate a situation of gender-based violence and resort to care services, these services neglect these women's cases because they assume that the Roma community takes care of it. When a Roma woman does not find support in her community to leave a situation of gender-based violence, she is doubly unprotected when she reaches an administration that does not act because it assumes that Roma women have their own resolution channels. That is revictimization. Sometimes the protocol initiated from victim care services for gender-based violence is that the Roma mediators who may exist in the services talk to the aggressor to stop the violence situation. Some Roma mediators feel incapacitated to mediate in conflicts because they or their families may be put at risk. In these cases, there is a reduction of guarantees in the protection of Roma victims based on their own ethno-cultural condition, as in the justification of some sentences on abuse of Roma women in early marriages.

Another obstacle of this antigypsyist bias in the SSAVS is manifested in the stereotype that Roma women file false reports to obtain the social benefits reserved for victims of gender-based violence. They are required to file a report with the police or the courts for it to be considered truthful, and they are not guaranteed the protection that the regulations grant to these victims even when they have not reported. Further, expelling a Roma woman from a shelter for attending a funeral. The values of Roma culture are not recognized. In general, institutional regulations sanction women who return to the community by applying a strict protection parameter and not taking into consideration the community approach of Roma ways of life. Measures such as shelters for women victims of gender-based violence disregard the community child-rearing model of the Roma community. They do not work for cases of Roma women who must remain in their communities.

Another example of revictimization occurs in territories where it is uncommon for Roma women to go to care services and usually resort mostly to the own resolution channels of the Roma people. In these cases, there is overprotection and tutorship of the women, and they are sought to be referenced as examples to encourage other Roma women to go to victim care services for gender-based violence. As a result of this analysis, eight recommendations were developed with specific measures for their implementation. These recommendations dialogue with those contained in Recommendation CM/Rec (2024)¹ of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls and the latest GREVIO Report on Spain in 2024.

Recommendations on the Implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2024)¹ of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls (hereinafter CM/Rec 2024)

Specifically, on its Guideline IX: "Ensuring the protection of Roma and Traveller women and girls against violence"

1. Expand the concept of gender-based violence to encompass the complexity of intersectional violence suffered by Roma women. There is racist gender-based violence. They are racist violence that manifests mostly or solely against the female members of a racialized community, as in the case of the Roma community. A Roma hermeneutics that defines realities and concepts from the perspectives of people affected by this intersectional violence is necessary. The concept of gendered anti-Roma racism is an example of this hermeneutics or knowledge generated from situated positions affected by class, gender, and race oppressions.

2. It is recommended to facilitate channels for reporting violations of the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination suffered by Roma women in accessing victim care services for gender-based violence. Many anti-Roma discriminatory acts in accessing public resources go unpunished, even when reported. This deactivates trust among Roma people in reporting protocols. (This recommendation is supported by paragraph 37 a) of CM/Rec2024). Specific measures to carry out this recommendation:

- Support Roma entities so that they can file these reports collectively, without the need for individual reports, thus avoiding possible retaliation against Roma reporters.
- Establish administrative consequences to sanction professionals with a history of racial discrimination.
- Promote reports on violations of the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination of Roma women in accessing reporting for gender-based violence. These reports must be protected from the situated perspective of Roma women.
- Promote quantitative and qualitative research conducted by Roma entities on anti-Roma bias in victim care services for gender-based violence and social services.

3. It is recommended to promote and finance the generation of situated knowledge on the situation of Roma women victims of gender-based violence. (This recommendation is supported by paragraph 42 of CM/Rec 2024). Specific measures to carry out this recommendation:

- Finance state research conducted by Roma women's entities themselves. It is recommended as a good practice example the Diagnosis for the Design of a Training with a Roma Perspective for Professionals in the Victim Care System for Gender-Based Violence conducted by the Association of Roma Women of Euskadi (AMUGE).
- Promote the creation of an observatory on gendered anti-Roma racism that compiles and documents cases of gender-based violence against Roma women.

4. It is recommended to implement the measures arising from the situated research (Recommendation 2) to adapt victim care services for gender-based violence to the real needs of Roma women in the process of reporting gender-based violence. (This recommendation is supported by the GREVIO Report on Spain 2024. Specifically, by Proposal II. B.2.a) of its Appendix I). Specific measures to carry out this recommendation:

- Promote and guarantee the work of Roma women professionals who perform victim accompaniment tasks and carry out mediation between the Administration and the affected women.
- Establish protocols accessible to Roma women who go to victim care services for gender-based violence. These protocols must have special consideration for the community child-rearing model of the Roma community and avoid separating women victims of gender-based violence and their children from their communities.
- Guarantee mandatory training for professionals in victim care services for gender-based violence on the history and culture of the Roma people with an intersectional approach.

5. It is recommended to validate Roma women's entities to accredit the victim status of Roma women victims of gender-based violence. (This Recommendation is supported by the GREVIO Report on Spain 2024. Specifically, by Proposal III.B.2.a) of its Appendix I). Specific measures to carry out this Recommendation:

- Contemplate the figure of Roma women experts in prevention of gender-based violence with the capacity to issue valid reports on cases of Roma women.
- Design training to capacitate these Roma women experts in prevention of gender-based violence in the preparation of social reports.
- Endow these reports with validity and credibility to activate victim protection protocols.

6. Validate the internal protocols of the Roma community to intervene in cases of gender-based violence and recognize them as valid protocols and norms. Deconstruct the stereotypes of primitivism or savagery about these forms of self-management of conflicts and violence situations. (This Recommendation is supported by recommendation No. 17 of ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 13). Specific measures to carry out this Recommendation:

- Institutionally recognize these internal protocols as a reference for good practice in restorative justice.
- Institutionally recognize these internal protocols as a reference for good practice as a community practice of justice self-management.

7. Involve Roma women's entities in the different stages of public policy formulation for the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring. (This Recommendation is supported by Guideline XI, paragraph 50 of CM/Rec 2024). Specific measures to carry out the Recommendation:

- Foster the capacitation of Roma women's associations so that they can monitor and evaluate public policies designed for Roma women victims of gender-based violence.
- Guarantee quotas for the representation of Roma women's entities in the monitoring bodies of public policies for the prevention of gender-based violence.
- Promote and support a state network of Roma women who can evaluate and monitor public policies.

8. Develop valid indicators to periodically evaluate the policies and measures aimed at meeting the specific needs of Roma women victims of gender-based violence. (This Recommendation is supported by the GREVIO Report on Spain 2024. Specifically by Proposal II. B.2.b) of its Appendix I). Specific measures to carry out this Recommendation:

We consider that the number of reports filed could not be a valid quantitative indicator for evaluating special policies for Roma women. It would not be a valid indicator since the resolution of gender-based violence in the case of Roma women in a high percentage is resolved within the communities without the need to file reports, as has been exposed in the analysis preceding these recommendations. The following would be valid indicators:

- The number of Roma women being trained in prevention of gender-based violence.
- The number of training sessions provided by public administrations adapted to the realities of Roma women for the prevention of gender-based violence.
- The number of programs launched by public administrations to train professionals in gender-based violence prevention services on the culture of the Roma people and in prevention of anti-Roma racism.
- The number of Roma women victims of gender-based violence who go to Roma women's associations without their cases being referred to other public resources.
- The number of cases of Roma women victims of gender-based violence communicated to social services without a prior report.
- The number of groups of Roma women or community groups that are working on the prevention of the intersectional violence suffered by Roma women.

Internal Recommendations for the European Network of Women Experts in Gender:

- Update the concept of gender-based violence by adding the specific violence's suffered by Roma women.
- It is recommended that the final results of this report be presented in Brussels and presented to the mechanisms of GREVIO, ECRI, and ADI-Rom.
- Through the person in charge of Spain in ADI-Rom, María Dolores Ruiz of the Ministry of Social Affairs, we can send reports and recommendations to ADI-Rom. It is also possible to present it to the group of Roma experts of ADI-Rom or through some of the affiliated collaborating entities.

National report of United Kingdom

Analysis of the National Context: Gender-Based Violence and Racism against Romani Women

Structural and Systemic Drivers

In the United Kingdom, Roma and Traveller women experience a layered form of discrimination in which anti-Roma racism and sexism. Council of Europe bodies have repeatedly pointed to the absence of a coherent, UK-wide framework addressing the situation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Participants felt this omission acutely. They described a persistent feeling of invisibility in national equality frameworks, a sense that institutions “*talk about us, but do not talk to us.*” ECRI’s Sixth report on the United Kingdom (2024) notes that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller issues are only marginally referenced in the UK Government’s ‘Inclusive Britain’ Action Plan and recommends the adoption of a UK-wide strategy specific to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, developed in close consultation with them and properly funded.^[64]

Structural anti-Roma racism

At the same time, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC), in its Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, calls for comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategies to combat anti-Roma racism and anti-nomadism, with specific measures and outcomes for women, young people and older people.^[65] Participants also pointed out and criticised that national policy frameworks continue to treat ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ communities as a single homogeneous category. They stressed that this umbrella label erases the distinct experiences of European Romani women (Central and Eastern European Romani women), particularly those who migrated to the UK in the last two decades. Several described how policy language collapses the diversity of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, masking differences in language, migration status, cultural norms and barriers to accessing services. As one participant explained, “*We are not the same. We don’t live in caravans, we don’t have horses. Our issues are different. Yet the reports don’t see us at all.*”

Housing and policing policies

Housing and policing policies are a central structural driver. ECRI’s Fifth report on the UK (2016) and subsequent monitoring highlight a shortage of authorised Traveller sites, widespread refusal of planning permission, and the resulting reliance on unauthorised encampments, which expose families to repeated evictions and insecurity.^[66]

[64] ECRI’s Sixth report on the United Kingdom, 2024, page 27, paragraph 100, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/1680b20bdc>

[65] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’ Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 4, paragraph 2, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[66] ECRI’s Fifth report on the United Kingdom, 2016, page 31, paragraph 93, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/16808b5758>

The situation has been further aggravated by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, which criminalises unauthorised encampments and trespass with a vehicle and allows police to confiscate caravans. ECRI warns that these measures disproportionately impact Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and can be triggered merely on the basis that an encampment is said to cause “distress” to local residents, a threshold easily reached in a context of entrenched anti-Roma racism.^[67]

Discriminatory education system

Education systems also reproduce structural discrimination. In its Sixth report, ECRI notes that teaching about Roma history, including the Roma genocide, slavery and colonialism, is uneven and often left to individual teachers’ discretion. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and de-colonisation are not taught in all schools.^[68] ECRI therefore calls for mandatory teaching on these themes for all learners and for clearer guidance and minimum standards for teachers.^[69] At the same time, the report highlights very high levels of school bullying affecting GRT children, with organisations in England reporting that around 70% of Traveller and Roma children experience bullying.^[70] These findings echo the ACFC Fifth Opinion, which concludes - drawing on Race Disparity Audit data - that “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils have the worst education outcomes of all ethnic groups, with only 8.1% of White Gypsy or Romani students in England achieving a standard GCSE pass at age 16 (compared to 49.9% for the rest of the population) and the highest rates of exclusions and persistent absence.^[71] The ACFC also records serious and violent bullying, including racist slurs, and notes that many parents withdraw their children from school for safety reasons.^[72]

Generational fear

A sense of generational fear of authority also came up during discussions. Participants connected this fear directly to histories of persecution - including the genocide against Roma during the Second World War, which remains largely unacknowledged in British public life. As one woman put it: *“We carry trauma. If we go to the police, NHS, school - there is fear behind everything.”* The absence of Roma representation in the national curriculum, particularly regarding the Roma genocide, reinforces the perception that Romani lives and suffering are less valued.

[67] ECRI’s Sixth report on the United Kingdom, 2024, page 28, paragraph 104, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/1680b20bdc>

[68] Ibid, page 8, paragraph 10

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid, page 10, paragraph 22

[71] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’ Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 36, paragraph 187, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[72] Ibid, page 4, paras 5-6, also see page 7, paragraph 30.

Public discourses

Public discourse and media practices further institutionalise anti-Roma racism. ECRI's Fifth report documents the role of tabloid newspapers in encouraging prejudice against Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, often through sensationalist stories and dehumanising language, and recalls concerns raised by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights about "sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse" in parts of the UK press.^[73] This hostile environment shapes local politics - particularly around site provision - and normalizes everyday hate speech, which Romani women encounter in streets, neighborhoods and online spaces confirmed by the participants.

Discrimination

In the UK, structural discrimination manifests in subtler but equally harmful ways. A participant working inside the NHS as an interpreter/translator described systemic racism among staff: derogatory comments about Romani patients' hygiene, poverty, or education, inconsistent treatment practices, and prejudiced assumptions about Romani women's reproductive choices. She summarised it painfully: *"They treat Romani patients kindly to their face, but the moment the door closes, they gossip about them... They wear gloves only for Romani women. They ask why we smell, why we are uneducated."* Such attitudes create a culture within public services where Romani women arrive already assumed to be problematic or undeserving.

Lack of intersectional policies

Gender equality and violence-against-women policies do not yet fully integrate an intersectional lens. In its Baseline Evaluation Report on the UK under the Istanbul Convention (2025), GREVIO notes that women facing intersectional discrimination - including Romani and Traveller women - experience additional barriers in accessing general and specialist services and in reporting violence to authorities.^[74] GREVIO explicitly urges the UK to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are implemented without discrimination and to integrate the perspectives of Romani and Traveller women (alongside other marginalised groups) into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies to prevent and combat violence against women.^[75]

These observations resonate with insights from the workshop, where participants emphasised that Romani and Traveller women are often invisible in national strategies on both equality and gender-based violence, despite being among those most affected.

[73] ECRI's Fifth report on the United Kingdom, 2016, page 18, paragraph 40, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/16808b5758>

[74] GREVIO's Baseline Evaluation Report on the United Kingdom, 2025, page 19, paragraph 29, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-s-baseline-evaluation-report-on-legislative-and-other-measures-/1680b66579>

[75] Ibid, page 19, paragraph 3.

Manifestations of Violence and Discrimination:

At interpersonal level, Roma and Traveller women are part of a broader national crisis of violence against women. Official data show that in the UK a woman is killed by a man approximately every three days, and violence against women and girls constitutes just under 20% of all recorded crime in England and Wales. In the year ending March 2023, over 103,000 rape and serious sexual offences were recorded by the police.^[76] Workshop discussions confirmed that Romani women experience physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, often in conditions of overcrowded or insecure housing, poverty and limited access to support.

Institutional violence

Institutional responses frequently reproduce racism and mistrust. Institutional violence emerged as a major theme during the workshop/training. Participants repeatedly described policing as a source of danger, not protection. Women recounted cases where Romani women - especially those with limited English - were profiled as criminals, ignored, or treated with suspicion. One incident involved a Romani woman attempting to retrieve her husband's car after his arrest. Because she did not have the key and spoke little English, police officers handcuffed her in front of her seven-year-old son, assuming she was attempting to steal the car. She was only released after one of the participants, a community advocate intervened by phone. *"They didn't want to listen to her," the advocate recalled. "They saw her clothes, her accent... they assumed she was a thief."* When it comes to hate crimes, ECRI's Sixth report notes that, although third-party reporting of hate crime is possible, under-reporting remains a serious problem.^[77]

Lack of trust in the justice system

Also, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities rarely report crimes committed against them due to lack of trust in police and the justice system.^[78] The women participating in the workshop described a pattern of "over-policing and under-protection": frequent police attention to encampments and minor offences, combined with reluctance to intervene effectively in cases of domestic abuse or hate-motivated attacks.

[76] National Police Chiefs' Council, 'Violence Against Women and Girls', available at: <https://www.npcc.police.uk/our-work/violence-against-women-and-girls/>

[77] ECRI's Sixth report on the United Kingdom, 2024, page 19, paragraph 65, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/1680b20bdc>

[78] The Traveller Movement, 'The preliminary report: Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Irish Travellers and the police', June 2018, page 15, available at: <https://wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Policing-by-Consent-Report-2018.pdf>

Violence in education

In education, violence often takes the form of sustained racist bullying and exclusion and participants also described racist bullying as widespread that is often followed by institutional silence. The ACFC Fifth Opinion notes that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils face serious and violent bullying, and research cited there shows that in one London study 63% of Traveller girls reported being bullied by other pupils and 67% by teachers, with bullying identified as the single biggest reason for leaving school.^[79] ECRI's Sixth report similarly records that bullying, including cyber-bullying, is widespread across the UK and that organisations working with Traveller and Romani families report school bullying affecting around 70% of these children.^[80]

Health inequalities

Health inequalities intersect with violence and discrimination. Drawing on earlier cycles, ECRI and the ACFC underline that Traveller women are expected to live around 12 years fewer than women in the general population,^[81] and that Traveller and Romani communities face higher rates of chronic illnesses, poor maternal health and mental health problems, combined with barriers in accessing health services.^[82] Participants gave examples of NHS staff speaking to them with condescension, assuming illiteracy, questioning their cleanliness, or refusing physical contact. One participant described an elderly Romani woman who was humiliated at a GP surgery when staff asked her whether she “knew how to write”, simply because she could not see the form without her glasses. The woman became distressed and raised her voice - only to be labelled “aggressive.”

Interconnected and intergenerational structural violence

Participants emphasised that gender-based violence in Romani and Traveller women's lives takes on multiple, interconnected forms: domestic violence rooted in patriarchal norms, institutional violence in interactions with state systems, discriminatory violence in education and healthcare, and public hostility that makes their marginalisation worse. Many participants described witnessing domestic violence from early childhood. Several spoke about how patriarchal norms within their communities normalised male control and physical punishment. One woman explained: *“In our culture, the man is the head of the house. If the wife disobeys, he hits her. My grandmother lived like this. My mother lived like this. And so, do many women now.”* She emphasised that such violence becomes intergenerational: girls raised in environments where abuse is normalised often enter adulthood believing they must accept it.

[79] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 36, paragraph 18, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[80] ECRI's Sixth report on the United Kingdom, 2024, page 10, paragraph 22, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/sixth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/1680b20bdc>

[81] ECRI's Fifth report on the United Kingdom, 2016, page 34, paragraph 106, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/fifth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/16808b5758>, see also Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, pages 43 – 44, paragraph 233. See also National Social Inclusion Office, 'Irish Travellers', available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/#:~:text=Traveller%20women%20live%20on%20average,compared%20to%20the%20general%20population>

[82] ECRI's Fifth report on the United Kingdom, 2016, page 34, paragraph 106, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/fifth-report-on-the-united-kingdom/16808b5758>

The cycle is maintained not only by gender norms but also by extreme social isolation and economic dependence and conditions worsened by discrimination in the public sector. As an example, GREVIO notes that in Scotland there is a shortage of specialist support services and culturally appropriate safe accommodation for Romani women who are victims of violence, and that ethnic minority women more broadly face discrimination and racism when using mainstream gender-based violence services.^[83] For many Romani and Traveller women, child protection services are another source of fear. Participants spoke of a “silent epidemic” of child removals from Romani and Traveller families in the UK. Instead of receiving support, they felt that their parenting was immediately scrutinised through a racialised lens. As one participant stated: “Child protection becomes a threat, not help. Reporting domestic violence just exposes you to losing your children.” This fear affects Traveller and Romani women’s willingness to seek help for abuse, creating a dangerous paradox in which escaping violence can mean losing their children.

Taken together the Council of Europe monitoring bodies’ reports and the participant’s testimonies, it is revealing that violence against Romani and Traveller women cannot be confined to domestic settings. It is a continuum, from the home, to the classroom, to hospitals, to police stations, where every sphere reinforces the next.

Evidence and Data Landscape:

On the positive side, there is statistical evidence of educational inequalities concerning Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Using data for England, the Race Disparity Audit - cited in the ACFC Fifth Opinion - shows that “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils have lower education outcomes than other ethnic groups and they had the highest rates of exclusions and persistent absence.^[84] The ACFC also underlines that, while some action plans exist in Wales and Northern Ireland, disaggregated data on absenteeism and drop-outs remain scarce, and recording of racist bullying is inconsistent - Northern Ireland’s template, for example, lacks an ethnic identifier and records only “racial” motivation.

[85]

[83] GREVIO’s Baseline Evaluation Report on the United Kingdom, 2025, page 63, paragraph 221, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/grevio-s-baseline-evaluation-report-on-legislative-and-other-measures-/1680b66579>

[84] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’ Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 36, paragraph 187, available at: <https://rmcoe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[85] Ibid.

In other sectors, such as employment and social protection, the ACFC notes that 63% of Gypsy or Traveller women are economically inactive,^[86] often due to unpaid care responsibilities, and that Roma migrants face specific barriers linked to insecure work, digital exclusion and difficulties proving residence status (for example in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme)^[87]. These structural inequalities contribute to women's vulnerability to violence and their ability to leave abusive situations, but are often not captured in gender based violence-specific data.

When it comes specifically to gender-based violence against Romani and Traveller women, most information comes from NGOs and qualitative research rather than official statistics. National datasets on domestic abuse, sexual offences and homicide are not systematically disaggregated by ethnicity in a way that would allow Romani and Traveller women's experiences to be identified.^[88] According to the Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities report, data on the prevalence of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities remain extremely limited. However, evidence shared by specialist agencies and frontline practitioners indicates that the problem is both serious and longstanding. It is estimated that up to 75% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women experience abuse at some point in their lives.^[89]

Finally, equality data frameworks are themselves incomplete. The ACFC observes across the UK more consistent, gender- and ethnicity-disaggregated data are needed in areas such as policing, child protection, bullying and access to services. Both GREVIO and ECRI stress that without such data, it is difficult to design, implement and evaluate effective policies that respond to the specific realities of Romani and Traveller women. Workshop participants echoed this conclusion, emphasising that Romani and Traveller women remain largely invisible in official statistics on gender-based violence, and that meaningful participation of Romani women's organisations in data design and interpretation would be essential to change this.

[86] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 41, paragraph 218, available at <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[87] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities' Fifth Opinion on the United Kingdom, 2022, page 41, paragraph 217, available at <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-uk-en/1680ab55b4>

[88] House of Commons Committee report, 'Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities', 2019, paragraph 158, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html>

[89] Ibid.

Recommendations from the Workshops

The three-day workshop generated a set of concrete, community-driven recommendations rooted in the lived experience, professional expertise and collective analysis of Romani women participants in the UK. These proposals respond directly to systemic anti-Roma racism, gender-based violence, institutional racism and the data gaps identified across education, policing, child protection, housing and healthcare. They aim to guide UK authorities, local services, and Council of Europe monitoring bodies toward more accountable, evidence-based, and culturally competent action.

Recommendations for UK authorities, local councils & public services

1. Official recognition and policy change

Participants insisted that the UK must formally acknowledge anti-Roma racism as a structural form of racism, equivalent to antisemitism or Islamophobia. They recommended:

- Official adoption of an IHRA-style definition of anti-Roma racism
- Inclusion of antigypsyism in National Violence Against Women & Girls strategies and equality frameworks.
- Consistent use of the term “anti-Roma racism” in all governmental, monitoring and institutional reporting (as one participant said, “They would never omit antisemitism - so why is anti-Roma racism missing?”).

2. Separate “Roma” from ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ in all data and policy

Romani participants unanimously stated that being grouped under ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ hides their distinct experiences. They urged:

- A separate Romani ethnicity category across all public services (police, NHS, schools, housing, gender based violence services, etc).
- Development of Roma-specific policies, particularly for Central and Eastern European Romani women facing language barriers, migration status issues and institutional racism.
- Shadow reports and official monitoring should treat ‘Roma’ and ‘Travellers’ as distinct populations with different needs.

3. Create a National Roma & ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ Women’s Strategy

Participants emphasised the need for a dedicated, gender-specific national strategy addressing:

- Gender based violence and domestic violence
- Child protection practices
- Health inequalities
- Housing insecurity and evictions
- Education discrimination
- This strategy should be co-designed with Romani and Traveller women and supported with long-term funding for grassroots organisations.

4. Build culturally competent, safe and accessible gender-based violence services

Participants described severe mistrust in services and fear of child removal. They recommended:

- Dedicated Romani cultural mediators and interpreters in gender-based violence services.
- Training for all police officers, social workers, midwives, healthcare staff, teachers and gender-based violence professionals on Romani cultures, language barriers, and anti-Roma racism.
- Culturally appropriate emergency accommodation and shelters that protect women from racism and sexual harassment, including from staff, as reported by participants.

5. Safe reporting mechanisms for domestic and institutional violence

Reporting violence currently exposes Romani women to racism, disbelief, or child removal. Participants recommended:

- A confidential Roma-specific helpline, similar to the Asian Women's Network model.
- Guaranteed safe reporting pathways that do not automatically trigger child protection investigations when unnecessary.
- Creation of statutory, trauma-informed protocols for police and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) that address language barriers and cultural context.

6. Reform MARAC and police risk assessments

Women explained that Romani survivors cannot safely disclose abuse during phone-based assessments. They recommended:

- MARAC must develop Roma-specific guidance for identifying risk.
- Assessments should not rely solely on English-language phone interviews.
- MARAC should collaborate directly with Roma-led groups to improve procedures.

7. Address systemic discrimination in healthcare

Participants described widespread racist behaviour, discriminatory treatment and humiliating practices in NHS settings. Recommendations include:

- Mandatory training on anti-Roma racism and cultural safety for all NHS staff.
- Employing Romani maternity link workers, doulas and health advocates.
- Reforming maternity questionnaires that trigger fear ("Will you be able to look after your child?").
- Establishing mechanisms for real-time monitoring of racist treatment in surgeries and hospitals.

8. Improve education protections and accountability

Workshop participants identified lifelong consequences of racist schooling. Recommendations:

- Mandatory inclusion of Roma history, the Roma genocide, and migration experiences in UK curricula.
- Anti-bullying frameworks that explicitly reference anti-Roma racism.
- Formal investigation routes when teachers or schools discriminate against Romani children.

9. Protect Romani and Traveller families from forced evictions

Participants emphasised that housing instability increases vulnerability to violence. They recommended:

- Ending evictions without prior safeguarding assessments.
- Prioritising culturally appropriate housing for women fleeing domestic violence.

10. Fund Romani and traveller women-led organisations

Romani and Traveller women's organisations are the main point of trust for survivors. Recommendations:

- Long-term, ring-fenced funding to support early intervention, gender based violence prevention, rights education, advocacy and research.
- Paid roles for Romani mediators, interpreters and community navigators

Recommendations Specifically for Council of Europe monitoring bodies (GREVIO, ECRI, ACFC)

1. Engage directly with Romani and Traveller women's grassroots groups

Participants explained that monitoring bodies often visit only majority-led NGOs, not Romani organisations. They recommended:

- Direct invitations to Romani women's organisations in every monitoring cycle.
- Formal consultations with Romani survivors and frontline workers.

2. Use the term "antigypsyism" consistently

Participants noted that ECRI and GREVIO reports sometimes avoid the term, despite using "antisemitism" or "anti-Muslim hatred." They urged the Council of Europe to:

- Require explicit use of anti-Roma racism in all UK reports and analyses.
- Treat structural anti-Roma racism as a fundamental driver of violence.

3. Require ethnicity- and gender-disaggregated data

Monitoring bodies should require the UK to:

- Separate Roma from Traveller and Gypsy categories.
- Collect data on: reproductive health, maternal discrimination, obstetric violence, sexual violence, hate-motivated violence, child removals, police profiling, and access to shelters.
- Participants emphasised that without data "we do not exist."

4. Demand Roma and Traveller specific gender-based violence research

Participants highlighted that GREVIO and ECRI currently reference very little data about Romani and Traveller women. They recommended:

- Commission a Council of Europe study on gender-based violence affecting Romani and Traveller women in the UK.

- Require the UK to conduct national research on maternal health, reproductive rights, domestic abuse and mental health.

5. Address gaps in policing and child protection practices

Participants called attention to:

- Racial profiling in police interventions.
- The “epidemic” of child removals from Romani and Traveller families.
- They urged GREVIO and ECRI to scrutinise these practices explicitly and require ethnic monitoring.

6. Ensure accountability and transparency

Participants insisted that CoE reports should:

- Include detailed footnotes and sources when referencing Roma (as is done for Black or Asian communities).
- Acknowledge missing data instead of ignoring it.
- Evaluate whether UK authorities complied with previous recommendations.

Conclusions: An Open Letter

To European Governments, Institutions, and the Conscience of Europe,

For us, the Romani and Traveller women from Europe this is *not* a report. We present you with our lives. We offer not recommendations, but truths. The words you have read are not abstract findings; they are the echoes of our daily reality, the map of a systemic betrayal that spans this continent. For too long, you have spoken about us—framing our pain as a cultural peculiarity, our poverty as a choice, our resistance as ingratitude. You have built institutions that, in the words of a sister from Spain, “*talk about us, but not with us. That’s why our real problems never appear in the reports.*” This era of voiceless representation ends now. We are the experts of our own oppression and the architects of our own liberation.

Our testimonies reveal a pan-European architecture of violence, meticulously crafted at the intersection of anti-Roma racism and patriarchal sexism. It is a system where, as a sister from Hungary laid bare, “*The system punishes you no matter what - if you don’t report, they take your children, if you do report, they still go after the children first.*” This is not a malfunction; it is the design. Police stations, hospitals, social services, and courtrooms are not sanctuaries but sequels to the violence begun in our homes. A sister from Bosnia and Herzegovina testified to two decades of this institutional torture: “*I knocked on every door... The police took the perpetrator for one night and returned him home by morning. This went on for 20 years. The system failed us completely.*”

We reject the racist alibi that this violence is our “culture.” We name it for what it is: **gendered anti-Roma racism**—a political and economic system that uses our bodies as sites for the rehearsal of racial and sexual domination. When courts in Spain reduce sentences for the sexual abuses of Romani girls by invoking racist stereotypes about “early marriages,” they are not respecting culture; they are licensing pedophilia under the banner of racism.

Our struggle is not for inclusion into your broken systems. We do not seek to be “integrated” into a child protection regime that sees our families as inherently neglectful, or a police force that, as another Hungarian sister stated, “*don’t even take the report. I feel like they don’t believe me from the very beginning.*” We demand the dismantling and radical re-imagination of these structures.

Therefore, our call is revolutionary:

Stop the Data Erasure. As a sister from UK declared, *“If there is no data, the problem does not exist. So, there is no funding. Roma women are invisible.”* Our visibility is non-negotiable. We demand ethnically disaggregated data, collected and owned by our communities, to shatter this enforced ignorance.

Redirect Power and Resources. Sustainable, flexible funding must flow directly to Roma women-led organizations. We are the first and last responders. We are the trust, the knowledge, and the solution.

We Recognize and Resource Our Autonomy. Our communities have internal protocols for justice and harm reduction. As articulated in Spain, institutions must *“adapt their protocols against gender-based violence to the community-based ways of life and child-rearing of Roma women.”* Support these community structures; do not criminalize them.

Implement Revolutionary Accountability. We demand independent oversight bodies with the power to sanction and remove professionals who perpetrate discriminatory violence. The era of impunity must end.

We conclude with the collective resonance of our Hungarian sisters; whose words bind our shared experience: *“We didn’t just learn about these issues - we’ve lived them. Every sentence that was said here is familiar from our own lives.”*

This report is our evidence. Our survival is our revolution. We will no longer negotiate for crumbs of dignity at the tables you control. We are building our own tables and on our own terms. We are not victims pleading for salvation. We are a political force announcing our sovereignty.

With the unwavering resolve born of centuries of resistance,
Romnja Women.

Feminist collective of
ROMANI GENDER EXPERTS



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