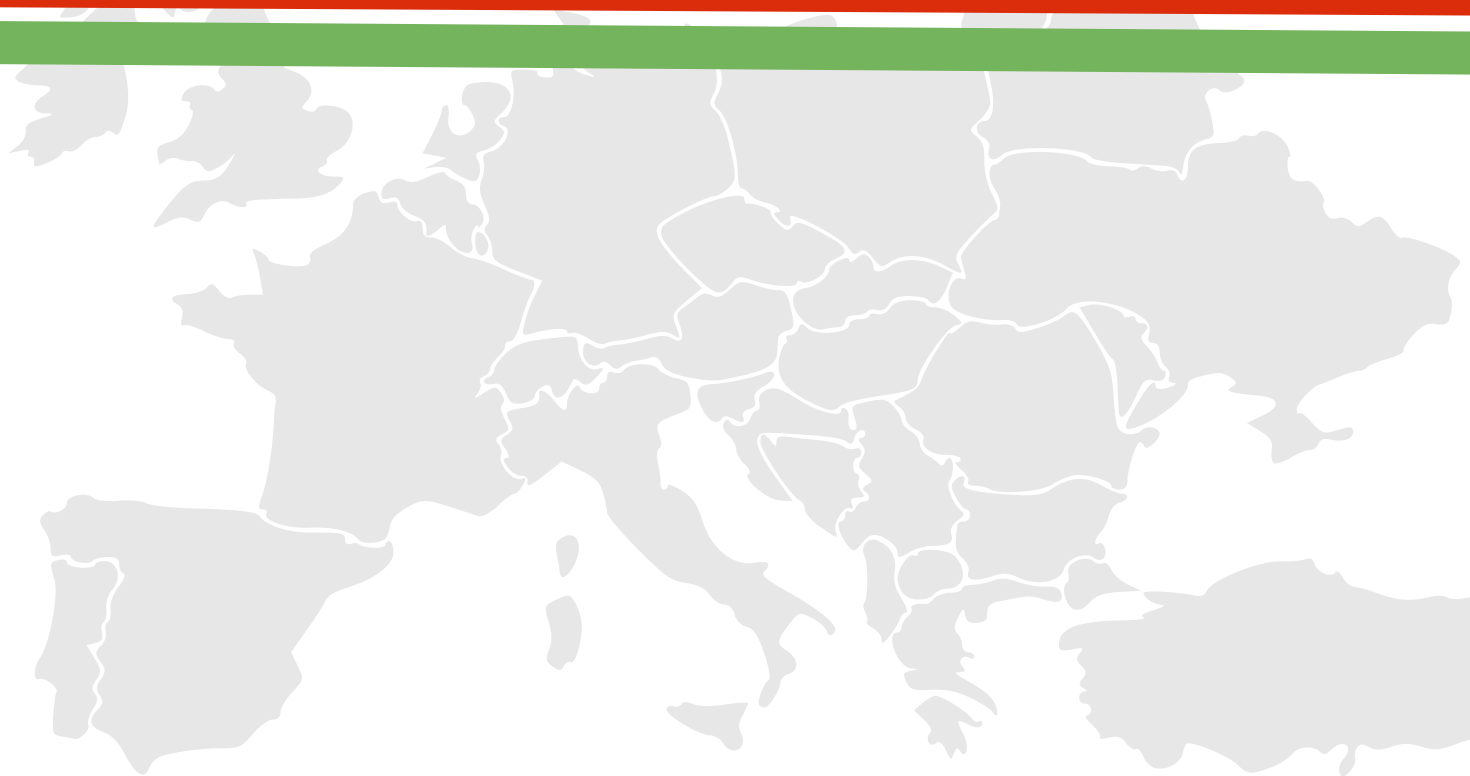


# Roma in the EU and Norway: Challenges and Best Practices for Empowerment

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2022



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## Executive Summary

This desk research was conducted as part of the “I have a dream” project by the Norwegian organization KUN Centre for Equality and Diversity in collaboration with the Bulgarian organization LARGO. Funding for this project was provided by the EEA and Norway Grants Active Citizens Fund.

This report comprises a review of academic works accompanied by practical insights from governmental, media, and civil society reports and publications. The textual data were collected from scientific databases and relevant government and NGOs’ websites, organized, coded, and analyzed in Nvivo software.

Roma is one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Europe - an estimated 10-12 million Roma live across Europe - as well as one of the most disadvantaged. The Roma are discriminated against in public spaces while addressing public services and contacting social institutions as well as by media, labor market, and educational institutions. According to the analyzed literature, representation of Roma in the media is one of the most challenging areas, because it not only supports the development and spread of negative stereotypes about Roma but also influences key-social institutions.

Various empowerment initiatives and practices address the oppression of and discrimination against Roma. The reviewed literature discusses development programs (scholarships, mentoring, and training), that aim to reduce barriers to getting an education and establish alliances between Roma and civil society organizations. These programs attempt to empower Roma women, youth, LGBTQ+, economically marginalized, and illiterate communities. Training initiatives seek to increase the presence of Roma in media and public debates on the national and local levels.

In recent years, projects aiming to empower Roma women have received increasing attention among academics, politicians, and service providers. The women empowerment initiatives cover the following areas: leisure time, mental and physical health, parenting, and household economy. Special attention is being paid to art as a method to empower Roma women in Europe. Visual and digital art are being used to build a more nuanced and less negative image of Roma and to empower Roma women. According to the analyzed articles and reports, art programs may facilitate collaboration between civil society and Roma communities, and prevent and reduce prejudice, exclusion, and marginalization of Roma, particularly Roma women.

The Roma remain one of the most marginalized social minority groups in Europe. For decades, decision makers have neglected the exclusion, gender inequality, and barriers to accessing education, the labor market, and social

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services that Roma experience. Nowadays, the situation is starting to improve, specifically, the challenges of Roma are gradually appearing on the agenda of politicians, civil society organizations, social workers, and academics. Furthermore, more Roma are becoming involved in the decision-making process to address these challenges in Norway and countries in the EU. Art, social-political and educational initiatives aimed at raising general population's awareness of the challenges Roma face might gradually increase the acceptance of Roma in Europe.

## 1. Introduction

Roma is a very heterogeneous group of people that are geographically dispersed beyond national borders, speak different variations of Roma, adhere to different religious affiliations and cultural practices (Sutkutė, 2020). Roma is also known as "Gypsies", "Cigany", and "Travelers". Academic resources tend to use the umbrella term "Roma", which comes from Romani "rom" – man. Thus, the term "Roma" covers many Roma and Traveller groups, with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and religious sub-groups practicing different settlement forms (Forray and Óhidy (2019). This ethnic group includes nomadic people who originated from the northern Indian subcontinent and migrated to Persia, southeastern Europe, and then western Europe.

The Norwegian Roma emigrated to Norway in the late 1800s, and today 500-700 Norwegian Roma live in Norway (Minken, 2021). According to Lidén and Engebriksen (2020), the Norwegian Roma are the descendants of five families who resided in Norway before the Second World War. The Norwegian Roma is one of the five groups defined as national minorities in Norway (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009). National minority refers to population groups that differ from the majority of the population in terms of ethnicity, religion, or language (Ivanov, 1998). In Norway, groups with a long-standing attachment to the country are considered national minorities ("National minorities", n.d.). Thus, only the Roma with a long-term connection to Norway, Norwegian citizenship, and who live more or less permanently in Norway are considered Norwegian Roma (NAFO, 2022).

Roma is one of the most marginalized ethnic minority groups in the European Union. They face a variety of challenges, including higher infant mortality rate and lower life expectancy; poor living conditions; lack of access to education, health care, labor, and housing markets; and discrimination, social exclusion, disempowerment (Cervi & Tejedor, 2020; Forray & Óhidy, 2019).

Even though Roma live in almost all European countries, the challenges they face rarely become a point of attention in educational systems, public debates, and research. Usually, Roma issues have negative connotations

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and are often referred to as a certain burden or problem that a particular country faces. Europe has a long history of discrimination and prejudice against Roma (Forray and Óhidy (2019). Cervi and Tejedor (2020) argue that Roma have historically been presented “as the race of criminals, genetically inclined to crime” (p. 3) in academic and public debates. However, the interest in Roma issues and challenges has gradually increased in the last twenty years. The discrimination and empowerment of Roma are gradually appearing on the academic agenda (Boros & Gergye, 2019; Ryder, 2014).

This desk research aims to provide an overview of the challenges Roma, and particularly Roma women, experience in Norway and countries in the European Union, and to provide an overview of suggested best practices in the field. The report presents an overview of specific projects, campaigns, and empowerment initiatives, as well as practical recommendations for tackling challenges faced by many Roma. The first part of the report discusses challenges such as discrimination, segregation, and exclusion of Roma, including barriers to accessing labor markets, and educational and health care services. The second part considers positive examples or “best practices” for combatting these challenges from selected countries. We pay special attention to the positive measures, policies, and initiatives designed to promote empowerment of Roma women in EU countries and Norway. When discussing challenges and best practices in Norway, this report primarily focuses on the Norwegian Roma. The effectiveness or results of the ideas and initiatives may or may not have been evaluated. Furthermore, the aim of this report is not to evaluate the practices.

## 2. Methods

The literature search and the selection were performed in several electronic multidisciplinary research databases, mainly Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE), ProQuest, JSTOR, Sage, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, Web of Science, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

The following keywords were applied in the literature search: “Roma/Gypsy/Travelers (RTD)” or “Romani”, together with the key-thematic terms: “challenges”, “best practices”, “empowerment”. Only articles focusing on Norway and the EU countries were chosen, since that is the focus of this report. After the initial literature search, 54 relevant articles and reports were selected for further analysis. The next stage of analysis included coding, categorization, and mapping of the data/knowledge on the topic in Nvivo.

In order to get additional insights and obtain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Norwegian Roma, we met with persons and organizations that have worked with Norwegian Roma for a long time.

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### 3. Challenges Faced by Roma

#### 3.1. Discrimination

Exclusion and discrimination remain one of the biggest challenges Roma experience in Europe. The main types of discrimination of Roma mentioned in the scientific literature is negative portrayals of Roma (Mendes, 2012); acculturation (Cron Dahl & Eklund Karlsson, 2015); Romaphobia<sup>1</sup> (Sutkutė, 2020); denial of rights, opportunities, and affirmation (Daróczy et al., 2021); and anti-Roma racism, antigypsyism<sup>2</sup> or antiziganism<sup>3</sup> (Olgaç, 2019).

As already mentioned, Roma is the most marginalized social group in Europe. Boros and Gergye (2019) argue that Roma people are discriminated against more than non-Roma people with similar socioeconomic status in Europe. According to Čvorović (2011), to facilitate integration, it is necessary to understand the nature, reasons, and consequences of Roma exclusion. Sutkutė (2020) mentions that most of the Roma in Europe experience exclusion when it comes to political participation, employment, education, health care and other social services.

Boros and Gergye (2019) mention stores, cafes, hospitals, schools and social security, financial and other public services as the most common places of discrimination against Roma. According to Ramirez (2021), traditional Roma clothing and accessories have become symbols of laziness, begging, poverty, and unwillingness to pursue a “normal” way of living.

The media refer to Roma as marginals, economic failures, uneducated and criminals, who are generally problematic and unwanted in society (Crespo et al., 2002). According to Mendes (2012) and Sutkutė (2020), this reflects the mainstream state rhetoric and attitude toward Roma. For instance, in the political discourse, Roma are portrayed as a security threat to society and therefore their deprivation is justified. The negative portrayals of Roma by the media and state actors lead to and reflect the formation of negative stereotypes in society, which eventually prevents any chance of integrating Roma in social institutions. For example, the stereotypes of being lazy (unwilling to work and study), and unintelligent (unable to study, read and write) prevent children from integrating into the education system and lead to growing antipathy and fear of Roma.

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<sup>1</sup> Romaphobia “captures the fear that motivates negative attitudes toward Roma communities” (McGarry, 2017, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> Antigypsyism is “a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization and the most blatant kind of discrimination” (European Commission, 2018, p.3).

<sup>3</sup> “Antiziganism refers to the discrimination and racism against the Roma. It indicates a group-based form of enmity and stems from the stereotypes about the Roma that already exist in society” (Rizzi 2021, p.312).

According to Crespo et al. (2002), the mass media set the “wrong and negative” Roma way of living against the “correct and desirable” European lifestyles (p. 12). By abandoning their traditional culture and norms, Roma can learn and achieve the culture and norms of mainstream society – the “best” or “right” culture (Cron Dahl & Eklund Karlsson, 2015, p.5). Furthermore, many Roma communities lack access to mainstream media, which prevents them from speaking up and presenting their own culture.

Institutional or state discrimination occurs when the state attempts to assimilate Roma into the majority society. For example, Corradi (2021) refers to forced evictions of Roma Camps as “state racism” (p. 154). According to Ramirez (2021), Roma women are especially exposed to institutional discrimination, they experience health injustices, biased communication, and consequently, loss of trust in healthcare providers. The most extreme forms of institutional exclusion are denial of citizenship and deportation.

The educational context is one of the main sites of institutional Romaphobia and anti-Gypsy attitudes. Messing (2008) argues that Roma children often get intimidated and physically insulted by their peers because of their ethnicity. Similarly, Olgaç (2019) describes negative treatment of Roma students by teachers. For instance, factors like living conditions and poor parenting are used to explain the low progress of some Roma students. Therefore, teachers are neither motivated nor willing to help Roma children get up to speed with the other students.

Čvorović (2011) believes that Roma discrimination and exclusion is caused by their choice of pursuing the traditional way of living and staying apart from education, technologies, and social infrastructure. In contrast, Kirkens bymisjon (2016) argues that the discrimination of Roma is the consequence of the failed attempts of the state to integrate the minority group. In Oslo, Norway, Roma have felt forced to isolate themselves from majority society to preserve and pursue their cultural heritage and way of living. Cron Dahl and Eklund Karlsson (2015) describe the attempts of mainstream society to force Roma to abandon their culture and norms for the “better and right” way of living (p.7).

### 3.2. Education and Labor Market Participation

According to Czarnota (2018), Roma children experience challenges accessing sports activities. While sport remains an important channel for socialization, inclusion, and education for Roma children, they experience a variety of barriers to accessing such activities across Europe. The barriers include both discrimination and negative attitudes toward Roma children, as well as cultural and stereotypes regarding education and parenting “in a Roma way” (Czarnota, 2018, p. 91). For instance, it is a cultural Roma norm that Roma girls should preferably participate

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in women-only activities. Therefore, NGOs and grassroots organizations attempt to expand the opportunities for participation of Roma children, especially girls into the sport and leisure time activities.

Roma experience different barriers to accessing education, therefore as Boros and Gergye (2019) mention, the higher the level of education, the lower the attendance of Roma students. Boros and Gergye (2019) estimate that only one percent of Roma in Europe attend universities. One of the reasons, according to Boros and Gergye (2019), is that Roma students prefer short-term education periods, for example, attending school for a few years to start financially providing for their families as early as possible. Another reason, mentioned by Czarnota (2018), is that Roma do not feel that they “fit in”.

Mendes (2012) mentions the nature of the Roma lifestyle and cultural features of parenting as one of the main reasons for low attendance in education activities. For instance, girls are often not permitted to attend school or obliged to leave earlier because some Roma consider socializing with non-Roma people, especially boys, unacceptable. Furthermore, pedagogical procedures and school routines are poorly adjusted to the requirements of Roma families. As Merhaut (2019) argues, the learning system is lacking practical knowledge, learning by doing, and active participation – activities that are more important in Roma families, compared to verbal instructions and preparation for participation. Furthermore, the school schedule and consequently the structure of the education process does not allow Roma communities to travel or live a nomadic life. Thus, Roma face the dilemma of whether to travel, which is an important part of their culture, or to keep their children in the formal education system. In addition, parents are often not able to help children with homework since they have not attended school themselves. As a result, the motivation for getting an education is quite low among Roma. Olgaç (2019) suggests that the presence of Roma teachers might be a solution to education challenges.

Education and employment are interrelated because education, directly and indirectly, provides access to the labor market. Lack of education may increase the risks of unemployment or participation only in unskilled/low paid work. Calado et al. (2019) argue that more than half of all Roma are unemployed and not looking for a job because of lack of education and work experience, as well as strong belief that nobody gives work to Roma. Similarly, Divinsky (1993) mentions barriers such as absence of existing social networks for (re)employment, and stereotypes that Roma are unwilling to work.

### 3.3. Living Conditions

Calado et al. (2019) argue that poor living conditions impact the various dimensions of Roma integration such as employment, education, and health. Most Roma in European countries reside in rural areas, with poor infrastructure and lack of access to social services. These areas are treated as ghettos, which further prevents any solution to the issues. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska (2015) mentions that Roma are not able to solve this challenge themselves due to discrimination and prejudiced treatment from property owners and the housing market. The social housing market is limited and hardly offers any better living conditions (Calado et al., 2019).

### 3.4. Gender Inequality

From an intersectional perspective, Roma women may be subject to multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, and classism. Roma women may therefore be particularly vulnerable and face different challenges than Roma men. Calado et al. (2019) argue that “traditional” gender roles are a vital element of the Roma way of living. While men are engaged in professional activities, women are mainly involved in household activities, such as taking care of their families. Roma women rarely participate in education activities. They have way less freedom of choice than men, and arranged marriages are common in Roma communities (Calado et al., 2019). According to Corradi (2021), mainstream feminism has mainly focused on reproductive health and preservation and promotion of Roma folklore, while neglecting discrimination, oppression, sexual exploitation, and abuse of Roma women.

Finding a solution to the inequality experienced by Roma women is challenging. From the position of the majority society, Roma women are oppressed and have fewer rights and less freedom than men. Roma households are typically patriarchal in structure, where the elder has authority over the young, and men have authority over women (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014). Furthermore, early arranged marriages are an important part of Roma's social life and traditional model of family. According to Tyldum and Friberg (2014), there are many indications that violence against women and children is common among Roma families. In contrast, some scholars argue that attempts to change traditional norms and gender roles might lead to assimilation, colonization, and destruction of the Roma way of living (Cron Dahl & Eklund Karlsson, 2015). Therefore, the “liberation” of Roma women might exacerbate exclusion, discrimination, and oppression of Roma, especially Roma women.

The next part of this paper considers the empowerment initiatives implemented in European countries and Norway, such as support from women’s- and youth organizations, development of meeting places, and networks.

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## 4. Best Practices for Empowering Roma

The United Nations define empowerment as:

the process of enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, a voice, in order to gain control. (UN Social Development Network, 2013, p. 3)

Governmental and non-governmental organizations in Europe have developed numerous projects to empower Roma. These projects mainly focus on education, research, communication and media, and developing partnerships.

Corradi (2021) suggests that Roma should form coalitions or alliances with gender activists, feminists, grassroots activists, and other civil society groups. These collaborations are focused on the promotion of Roma women's inclusion into the labor market, and the protection of oppressed Roma sub-groups, including people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, economically marginalized, and illiterate. By working together to organize demonstrations and publishing stories, these types of alliances will “generate new forms of knowledge among activists” (Corradi 2021, p. 154) and “create unity in diversity to fight for social rights” (Corradi 2021, p. 158), which will both impact Roma communities and the majority society. Corradi (2021) argues that alliances like these have increased Roma pride, self-organization, and resilience. Similarly, Divinsky (1993) mentions the importance of collaboration between Roma and non-Roma organizations to benefit both sides in Slovakia.

Kárpáti and Somogyi-Rohonczy (2021) consider courses related to the public and media presence of Roma. The Roma Cultural Influencer Training program aims to develop the verbal, visual, and digital communication skills of Roma women and girls to make them more visible in the media arena. Kárpáti and Somogyi-Rohonczy (2021) argue that these education opportunities not only improve the knowledge, skills, and creativity of Roma but change mindsets, stereotypes, and influence attitudes regarding Roma in Hungary in general and Hungarian media specifically. By developing communication skills, Roma women and girls can express their cultural heritage, social issues, and challenges that are on the front burner. Making the Roma minority more visible in the media may reduce stigmatization of Roma in Hungary. Similarly, Ljungberg (2018) describes initiatives using digital storytelling and a feminist approach to make the challenges Roma communities experience more visible in Spain, Sweden, and Romania. Art, including digital storytelling, is a way of creating positive images and countering the negative stereotypes the media has produced of Roma (Gustrén et al., 2021).

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Some Norwegian Roma have participated in an art project by documentary photographer and filmmaker Gorm Gaare about discrimination (Kirkens bymisjon, 2016). By using hidden cameras, the photographer and filmmaker documented discrimination against Norwegian Roma. The documentary led to several Norwegian businesses being reported to the police for discrimination (Baumberger, 2017). The documentary named "En for alle" ("One for all") was shown at Trondheim Documentary Festival in 2017 (Gaare & Hasvoll, 2017). Gaare's photographs were also shown at the exhibit "Hvite vegger, lange kjoler" ("White walls, long dresses") at the Intercultural Museum in Oslo in 2017 (Olsen, 2017). According to Kirkens bymisjon (2016), this project received positive feedback and interest from Roma communities in Norway.

Calado et al. (2019) discuss Roma youth development programs issued in Portugal. OPRE", "RESCUR" and "Dream Teens" are initiatives focused on reducing the barriers preventing Roma youth from entering the educational system, through scholarships, tutoring, and mentorship. Gustrén et al. (2021) argues that musical activities facilitate the inclusion and learning development of young Roma talents.

"Learnery" is an afterschool program developed and operated by Roma communities to improve school performance and develop interethnic community relationships, implemented in Italy, Switzerland, and Hungary. Co-operative and drama teaching methods are the key elements of "Learnery". The aim is to facilitate the collaborative problem-solving process among the students, as well as finding an effective way of resolving psychological cultural deprivation issues at school. Another goal of the program is to develop relationships between schools and parents. Messing (2008) argues that "school-parents dialogue" on schedules, deadlines and homework prevents school dropout and increases Roma students' interest and involvement in school activities, and positively influences the school atmosphere.

Olgaç (2019) considers education initiatives of the Swedish government aimed at the development of equality between Roma and non-Roma communities. According to the author, "Roma Culture Class" is a long-term project, which involves the teaching of the Roma language in schools by Roma teachers. This project facilitates Roma socialization, and inclusion, as well as the development of a more tolerant atmosphere in schools and society. Other relevant activities mentioned by Olgaç (2019) include anti-bullying and anti-discrimination training for children and teachers at schools and programs to increase the representation of Roma women among teachers at schools.

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According to Olgaç (2019), in 2012, the Swedish Government issued the strategy for Roma inclusion for the next 20 years. The main purpose of this plan is to facilitate the development of equality between Roma and non-Roma communities in Sweden through education, employment, housing, health, and culture domains. A similar action plan was developed by the Norwegian Government. The action plan underlines the importance of supervision and guidance of Roma in the labor market, health-care system, and other public services (Olgaç, 2019). According to the strategy, the Municipality of Oslo introduced measures to support Roma in Oslo, such as additional kindergarten spots for Roma children, and Norwegian language and society courses for Roma children and adults. These integration measures are not only oriented toward the Roma, but also toward the local population in Oslo. The Municipality of Oslo also introduced courses and training for public servants to provide more culturally appropriate and targeted services for Roma.

## 5. Best Practices for Empowering Roma Women

While the previous section focused on projects aiming to improve the living situation of Roma in general, the following section highlights some of the European projects aiming to empower Roma women and girls. These projects focus on parenting, employment, training and education, art, socialization, and physical and mental health.

Hagatun (2019) describes a project oriented toward “active mothers”, which facilitates the education of Roma women and provides insights on parenthood, socialization, and general support from non-Roma women. This project attempts to combine Roma's traditional way of living with active socialization and participation in educational activities. Another project aimed at the development of a more active role for Roma women in society is mentioned by Olgaç (2019). The Swedish Government introduced micro-finance interventions for Roma women, aiming to help Roma women establish catering businesses. Norwegian Kirkens Bymisjon (2016) discusses the establishment of the Roma Culture and Resource Center – Romano Kher in Oslo, where Roma and non-Roma people can meet, interact, learn from each other, and establish partnerships.

Kirkens bymisjon (2016) attempted to identify the needs of the Roma women in Norway and develop services to cover them. For instance, they found that some Roma women want to spend time with other adults on weekdays. Some also want to participate in courses, training, or receive guidance on different challenges they experience. Furthermore, some wanted to participate in work-related activities at the culture and resource center. According to the Action Plan (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009), Norwegian Roma has requested education in

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reading and writing in Norwegian (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2009). The Norwegian Roma were satisfied with the adult education project implemented in Oslo. The topics covered in the project were Norwegian language, mathematics, and digital skills (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2009).

Kirkens bymisjon (2016) argues that short courses about health and nutrition, drug use, and debt schemes should be available to Norwegian Roma. They also suggest offering courses to Roma women on how to establish businesses (Kirkens bymisjon, 2016). The Action Plan (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009) suggest that Roma are offered training in traditional skills, such as sewing. Since many Roma women enjoy sewing, a sewing room was established in the culture and resource center. The sewing room is used by Roma women doing repairs (for money) and to hold sewing courses (Kirkens bymisjon, 2016). Furthermore, many Roma women are interested in working with nail art and some already run nail art studios where they receive customers at home. Since nail art is something many Roma women are interested in learning, Kirkens bymisjon (2016) recommends that a nail art studio is established in the culture and resource center, for Roma women to use. As for leisure time, Roma women have voiced an interest in fitness classes, for example Zumba and other types of dancing (Kirkens bymisjon, 2016).

Many of the projects aiming to empower Roma women focus on art. Digital and visual art appear as method to promote Roma culture and a way of engaging Roma women in social activities. Digital art and art exhibitions have become a popular tool to showcase Roma culture and traditions, as well as the challenges Roma experience. Such usage of art attempts to involve Roma women in social and professional activities and create a more positive, realistic, and fair image of Roma in media and the collective consciousness. Roma women can use art to speak for themselves and challenge the stereotypical representations of Roma in mainstream media (Gustrén et al., 2021).

In 2014, the Intercultural Museum in Oslo held an exhibition called "Norvegiska romá – norske sigøynere. Ett folk - mange stemmer" ("Norwegian 'gypsies'. One people – many voices"). The idea behind the exhibition was to convey the experiences of Norwegian Roma. The exhibition was a result of several years of collaboration between the Oslo Museum and the Norwegian Roma community. The museum collected and documented the history, culture, and tradition of the Norwegian Roma, through film, photography, interviews with Roma, newspaper clips, text, and objects (Bothner-By, n.d.; Rashidi, 2015). At least twenty-eight Roma contributed to the exhibition by sharing their knowledge, experience, and stories with the museum employees. These qualitative conversations between the museum employees and the Norwegian Roma laid the groundwork for the exhibition. The main

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topics of the exhibition were “women in Roma culture” and “being Roma today” (Rashidi, 2015). The exhibition aimed to contribute to increasing the knowledge and understanding of Roma culture in Norwegian society and thus reduce prejudice and discrimination against Norwegian Roma. The project also helped Norwegian Roma to present their history and culture on their own premises (Kulturrådet, n.d.).

One of the art installations developed in collaboration with representatives of Norwegian Roma at the Intercultural Museum shows Roma women setting a table, preparing food, and discussing décor. The installation is used in the part of the exhibition where a group of Roma women is sharing their wedding traditions with the museum employees (Rashidi, 2015). Another art installation is a camping wagon decorated in collaboration between artists and two Roma women to show what their camping wagons typically look like (Bothner-By, n.d.).

Ljungberg (2018) used Digital Storytelling (DST) in their research to capture the stories and dialogues of Roma women activists and community members. DST can also be used for education, training, or professional development; knowledge translation; community development; and preserving cultural heritage. Khoshkesht et al. (2020) and Ljungberg (2018) found that DST allowed Roma women to reflect on challenges they face, as well as on resistance, solidarity, and hopes for the future. Storytelling, teamwork, and technology are used to produce short films of up to three minutes, consisting of photos, audio, and video (Khoshkesht et al., 2020). According to Rouhani (2019), active involvement of Roma women in the creation of stories support personal reflection and growth, which leads to empowerment. Furthermore, DST can also support collective action and encourage women’s groups to address critical issues, as well as the involvement of the most vulnerable Roma women. The digital stories raise awareness and facilitate advocacy on Roma women's issues (Rouhani, 2019).

Similarly, as part of the RoAd4health (2016-2019) project, Miranda et al. (2021) used a Photovoice methodology (for advocacy) – a type of participatory action research – linked to community advocacy to improve the health of local Roma communities in Seville, Spain. The authors describe this method as a “process that promotes meaningful engagement of communities to address the concerns through their eyes and voices” (p. 5). Through photovoice, Roma women had the opportunity to re-narrate their experiences with antigypsyism and oppression. The project aimed to build capacity among Roma and health care professionals to advocate for Roma health at the local level.

Over the two months, Roma women participated in weekly Photovoice sessions where they defined and prioritized challenges their community faces; took photographs in their neighborhoods; discussed and

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categorized the photographs together; developed a set of advocacy objectives based on their findings; and identified allies. The sessions resulted in the participants taking short-term and long-term advocacy actions. The authors found that Photovoice promoted personal development, helped the participants gain critical awareness, and inspired them to take individual and collective action. Miranda et al. (2021) argue that the findings confirmed that “building capacity for advocacy using Photovoice empowers and leads to personal development, improved self-esteem, self-confidence, critical thinking and perceived control, and enhances mutual learning and cohesion in the community” (p. 13). The Roma women that participated in the project involved the whole community in their advocacy actions and even established an advocacy group to continue to advocate for their rights after the project had ended (Miranda et al., 2021).

Banks (2019) used mixed media collage as a research method to understand how Roma girls express their identity, aspirations, and voice. Through creating mixed-media collages, the Roma girls got the opportunity to present themselves, their dreams and aspirations for the future, and their culture. According to Banks (2019), the girls were more confident discussing their lives and talking about themselves by the end of the workshops. Banks (2019) believes that “with continued involvement in the arts, the participants could very likely become positive influencers for the Roma pride movement” (p. 152).

Similarly, Kazubowski-Houston (2017) used dramatic storytelling as an approach to ethnographic research in small Roma community. The author believes that the dramatic storytelling sessions allowed Roma women to evaluate their lives and, consequently, take action. Kazubowski-Houston (2017) argue that dramatic storytelling can mobilize agency in the participants and educate the audience. In Romania, Giuvlipen – a Roma feminist theatre company – produces political, challenging, and experimental shows with a feminist agenda about racism, hate-speech, sexuality, and early marriages. In mainstream theaters, Roma actors are often cast in stereotypical roles. This Roma feminist theatre was established to counter this, and to address issues faced by Roma themselves, such as racism and sexism. Additionally, the theatre aims to offer an alternative to the common discourse about Roma. For example, one of their shows was inspired by four Roma women’s experience with early marriage. They also have an initiative where a trainer or actor works with women in Roma communities on the specific challenges they face (Iacobute, 2019).

In Hungary, the Corvinus University of Budapest organized the Roma Cultural Influencer Training Program as part of the HORIZON 2020 AMASS Project (Kárpáti & Somogyi-Rohonczy, 2021). It is a verbal, visual and digital communication skills development program for young Roma girls and women. According to Kárpáti and Somogyi-

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Rohonczy (2021), the aim of the program is to empower Roma girls and women to effectively express themselves online, develop a strong online presence, and to highlight current issues and achievements in their communities. The authors believe that this will contribute to changing the negative perceptions of Roma among majority members of Hungarian society. Social media was preferred over journalism and TV due to the accessibility of social media – social media can be accessed by anyone, and online success depends on skills that can be taught, such as creativity. The participants were taught how to create oral and written media pieces, as well as photos and videos (Kárpáti & Somogyi-Rohonczy, 2021).

Kárpáti and Somogyi-Rohonczy (2021) believe, that the participants found the program motivating and that they managed to acquire basic knowledge and skills and improve their self-esteem in 30 hours. More than one fifth of the participants managed to establish a presence in social media. Furthermore, the communication experts holding the sessions also learned from the participants and gained new perspectives on Roma culture. However, becoming an influencer and making an impact in the Roma community takes time. Making an impact on the majority Hungarian population is even more challenging and may require more training. Kárpáti and Somogyi-Rohonczy (2021) argue that, overall, the program can empower Roma women to present the interests of Roma more effectively.

## 6. Conclusion

Roma experience discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes across Europe. The biggest challenges are poor living conditions and lack of access to education and the labor market, as well as negative portrayals in media.

Roma women are especially exposed to these challenges, since they experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. Therefore, it is critical to establish empowering practices for combatting social exclusion, prejudices, and discrimination, and increasing public and political participation. However, Roma women face conflicting expectations from the Roma community and majority society on gender roles, which makes it more challenging to address and find solutions to these issues. Furthermore, attempting to change the roles and norms of Roma may lead to assimilation, colonization, and destruction of their traditional lifestyle.

This report highlights some of the European projects aiming to empower Roma women and girls. These projects focus on parenting, employment, training and education, art, socialization, and physical and mental health. Art is actively used to engage and empower Roma, particularly Roma women. Based on the analyzed articles, art

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facilitates the participation of the Roma women in media, employment, and education activities. By using different types of art, Roma women can speak up and raise awareness of their issues and their culture.

While there are some positive examples from the European countries on the attempts to address the Roma challenges in the recent years, there is still lack of relevant policies and projects. Furthermore, the existing empowerment practices alone cannot solve all the challenges Roma experience. Empowerment is not the solution to discrimination and prejudice. Finding the solution for these challenges requires fundamental changes on the macro level, namely the development and the implementation of the relevant policies focusing on the creation of the positive attitude toward Roma, by considering them as an equal part of the society, rather than as “others”.

The Roma remain one of the most disadvantaged minorities in the EU and Norway. Discrimination and exclusion of Roma has become “normalized” and a part of the public discourse. Transformation of this negative discourse requires time, willingness, and collective efforts of public, private, and civil society actors across Europe. While empowerment projects alone cannot solve the discrimination and exclusion Roma experience, the best practices outlined in this report are examples of methods that may empower Roma to act up against discrimination, as well as contribute to the development of more positive attitudes toward Roma across Europe. The best practices provide a knowledge base to be used by public, private, and civil society actors to give ground for Roma inclusion in the EU and Norway.

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