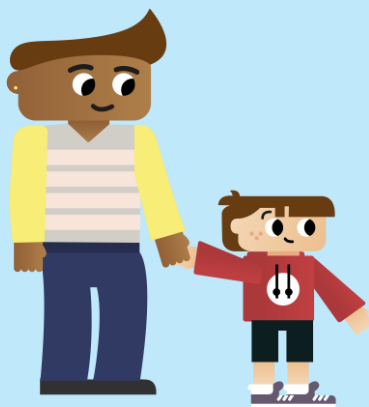


Roma Children across Europe

Taken from
*Children's Realities in Europe:
Progress & Gaps*
Eurochild 2024 flagship report
on children in need across Europe.



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On 20 November - World Children's Day - Eurochild released its flagship report on children in need titled "[Children's Realities in Europe: Progress & Gaps](#)", which compiles information from 57 Eurochild members in 31 countries across Europe. This sub-report presents country-specific analyses of the situation of Roma children, highlighting major gaps in policy implementation and providing recommendations for national governments to strengthen child protection systems, improve access to education, and tackle social exclusion. The findings highlight the urgent need for more targeted interventions and stronger political will to ensure that Roma children are not left behind.

Introduction

Europe is home to approximately 10 to 12 million Roma people, with around two-thirds residing in Central and Eastern European countries, constituting the biggest ethnic minority on the continent.¹ According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) the Roma communities across the European Union continue to experience profound socio economic challenges, with an alarming poverty rate of 83% among Roma children² - a statistic that starkly contrasts with the EU average of 21.7%.³

A 2024 UNICEF report highlighted that Roma children remain the most vulnerable and rights-deprived child population in Europe, with social indicators worse than those of some of the world's poorest countries.⁴ Many live in impoverished conditions, lacking essential services such as healthcare, education, electricity, and clean water.⁵ Across Europe, the school dropout rate for Roma children is around 90%, attributed to factors such as discrimination, poverty, and limited access to quality education.⁶ There is also a very low participation in early childhood education and care for both age categories 0-3 and 3-6.⁷ To illustrate, only 27% of Roma children participate in ECEC in Romania, and 35% of Roma children are estimated to be participating in preschool education in Slovenia.⁸

The employment rate for Roma remains significantly lower than the national averages. For example, in Hungary, only 47.3% of Roma were employed in 2022 compared to a national

¹ European Roma Rights Centre (n.d.) [Factsheet on Romani children in Europe](#).

² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2022). [Roma in 10 European countries – Main results from the Roma survey 2021](#).

³ European Commission. (2023). [Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023, Chapter 1.4.3. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union](#)

⁴ UNICEF (2024). [Europe's forgotten children](#).

⁵ UNICEF. (n.d.). [Roma children and ending child poverty](#).

⁶ Kurum Tiryakioglu, G., & Bulbul, T. (2024). [Roma Children's Access to Education: Barriers and Supports](#). *Journal of Poverty*, 1–24.

⁷ REYN (2023) [First Years, First Priority: Roma children](#).

⁸ European Commission. (2024). [2024 European Semester: Country Reports](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

average of 74.4%⁹. Low educational attainment with high dropout rates, discrimination, and socioeconomic barriers continue to hinder Roma integration into the labour market and therefore obstruct their chances to improve their socio-economic status and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Discrimination against Roma is pervasive across Europe, affecting various aspects of life, including housing, education, employment, and interactions with law enforcement.¹⁰ According to FRA, Roma individuals are disproportionately affected by the justice system - both as victims of crime and as individuals in contact with law enforcement - yet they often struggle to access legal protection and fair treatment. Structural barriers, racial profiling, and lack of adequate legal support further compound these injustices, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

Findings from Eurochild Members

Key Findings:

- Despite policy commitments, **many national strategies fail to implement sustainable and long-term solutions**, leading to **continued educational segregation and social exclusion** for Roma children.
- **Poverty is the primary factor affecting Roma children's well-being in 9 countries**, followed by **social exclusion and discrimination (6 countries)** and **limited access to education (5 countries)**.
- There are significant **disparities in healthcare, housing conditions, and employment opportunities** for Roma families, further exacerbating the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.
- To effectively address the needs of **Roma children**, greater alignment is needed between national strategic frameworks such as **Roma inclusion** and **the National Action Plan on the Child Guarantee** to ensure a **cohesive and integrated approach**.

Educational Segregation and Inequality

Roma children across Europe continue to face severe challenges in accessing quality education due to widespread segregation, discrimination, and systemic barriers. In **Romania**, the segregation of Roma children in schools has worsened over time, with rates increasing from 28% in 2016 to 51% in 2021. A study found that one in ten children in rural areas of **Romania** do not attend school, and one in three teenagers regularly miss school

⁹ European Commission. (2024). 2024 European Semester: Country Reports. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

¹⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2024). Addressing racism in policing: A guide for law enforcement (Publication No. FRA-2024).

due to household responsibilities. These factors disproportionately impact Roma children and other marginalised groups, making it harder for them to complete their education.

Similarly, in **Spain**, high levels of school segregation among Roma students have been recorded. A study of 112 educational centres found that 28.6% of them had a high concentration of Roma students, 31.2% were classified as segregated, and 40.2% were deemed extremely segregated. This degree of separation significantly limits the educational opportunities available to Roma children and restricts their social integration. Additionally, the school dropout rate in 2023 in **Spain** was 13.6% and disproportionately affects children living in poverty or social exclusion and Roma children. The digital divide further exacerbates educational inequalities, as many low-income households lack access to Internet and computers.

Slovakia has also struggled with integrating Roma children into mainstream education. In 2023, the European Commission referred **Slovakia** to the Court of Justice for failing to take effective measures to desegregate Roma children in its school system. The ongoing exclusion of Roma students from quality education continues to reinforce cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

Hungary has similarly failed to address the systemic discrimination faced by Roma students. School segregation remains a persistent issue, with Roma children often placed in separate classrooms or even entirely separate schools from non-Roma students. This lack of access to inclusive education reduces their opportunities for future employment and social mobility.

In **England**, Roma and Traveller children experience some of the worst educational outcomes. On average, they lag 18 months behind White British students at the end of secondary school. Gypsy and Roma children¹¹ are four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school which can have wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on children's futures. Roma children in **Wales** are also among the most educationally disadvantaged groups, with calls for greater support in terms of school funding, inclusive policies, and social welfare interventions to address their needs.

In **Kosovo**, the number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children included in the early childhood education system continues to be low. However, efforts have been made to improve the educational opportunities available to Roma children. **The CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale** has been a key initiative in providing early childhood education, counselling, and health support to Roma communities. This initiative aims to ensure that Roma children have a stronger foundation before entering the school system and can continue their education without facing excessive barriers.

¹¹ In the UK, it is common in data collections to differentiate between:

- Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people
- Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots)
- Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. The term Traveller can also encompass groups that travel. This includes, but is not limited to, New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees and Showpeople. See the [House of Commons Committee report on Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#) and the [UK Government's Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary](#).

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Roma children across Europe are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion, making them one of the most vulnerable demographic groups.

Several European countries, including **Romania**, **Spain**, and **Bulgaria**, have some of the highest child poverty rates in Europe. In these countries too, Roma children are among those most affected, with limited access to healthcare, education, and adequate housing. The economic hardships they face often lead to increased social exclusion, reinforcing barriers to participation in society.

In **Romania**, Roma children are explicitly identified as being at high risk of economic marginalisation and social disadvantage, requiring urgent policy interventions.

Spain has the second highest rate of child poverty in the EU, with the 2023 Living Conditions Survey revealing that children are the most vulnerable group, facing a poverty rate of 28.9%, which represents a 1.1% increase from the previous year. This age group has seen the greatest rise in poverty, and the percentage of children in severe material deprivation grew from 10.1% in 2022 to 10.8% in 2023. To address these challenges, the Spanish government should prioritise increased public investment in areas such as social housing, universal financial support for parents through refundable income tax deductions, and education, particularly for Roma children, children living in poverty, and immigrant children.

In **Bulgaria**, the government acknowledges Roma children as a key vulnerable group in need of support. The country's Child Guarantee National Action Plan (NAP) includes targeted measures to address the poverty and exclusion faced by Roma communities.

Hungary has also seen high levels of economic and social exclusion among Roma children. Due to systemic discrimination and a lack of opportunities, many Roma families struggle to break the cycle of poverty. Without proper intervention, these children are left without access to essential services, education, or social mobility pathways.

Greece is also faced with a high number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion – 28.1% in 2023 which hasn't improved since 2022. One of the most affected groups of social exclusion are Roma children. Eurochild members highlight that the country should provide support to Roma families, through dedicated programmes and with the participation of Roma communities in programme design and implementation.

In **Kosovo**, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities experience extreme poverty, with limited access to basic services and employment opportunities. Recognising the scale of the issue, the government has adopted the 2022-2026 Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of the Roma and Ashkali Communities. This strategy is aimed at improving living conditions, increasing educational participation, and promoting social inclusion.

In **Serbia**, Roma children face a high risk of poverty and social exclusion, along with other vulnerable groups such as children in street situations, those in alternative care, and children with disabilities. In 2022, the child poverty or social exclusion rate stood at 27.1%, with Roma children particularly affected due to factors like low parental education,

unemployment, and rural isolation. Despite these challenges, child poverty remains overlooked as a public policy priority.

Housing and Environmental Inequality

Roma children often live in poor housing conditions, segregated communities, and areas with severe environmental disadvantages. In **Romania**, many Roma communities suffer from environmental inequality, facing issues such as pollution, inadequate access to clean water, and poor air quality. These environmental challenges have a direct impact on children's health and well-being, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Similarly, in **Hungary**, Roma children experience housing discrimination, with many families forced into segregated or substandard living conditions. This lack of access to safe and adequate housing contributes to their overall vulnerability and restricts their ability to integrate into broader society.

In **Ireland**, the severe housing crisis among Traveller¹² and Roma families are not reflected in official statistics, yet research indicates they struggle significantly more than the general population to make ends meet. Traveller families, in particular, face major obstacles in accessing adequate housing, with approximately 39% experiencing homelessness.

In **Türkiye**, children living in poor neighbourhoods, Roma children, immigrant and refugee children, and those from areas affected by earthquakes are at a significantly higher risk of poverty, abuse, and neglect. These children also face increased risks of dropping out of school, child labour, malnutrition, and child marriage, which further exacerbate their vulnerability and hinder their future prospects.

Efforts for Social Protection and Inclusion

Despite the challenges faced by Roma children across Europe, some countries have introduced policies and EU-funded initiatives to improve their living conditions and access to services. In **Romania**, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) has allocated funding to address child poverty and social exclusion, specifically targeting Roma communities. This funding aims to provide better access to education, healthcare, and social services for Roma children.

In **Kosovo**, the CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale initiative has been instrumental in supporting Roma children through early childhood education, counselling, and health services. By providing a holistic approach to child welfare, this initiative seeks to break cycles of exclusion and marginalisation.

¹² Irish Travellers: traditionally, Irish Travellers are a nomadic group of people from Ireland but have a separate identity, heritage and culture to the community in general. An Irish Traveller presence can be traced back to 12th century Ireland, with migrations to Great Britain in the early 19th century. The Irish Traveller community is categorised as an ethnic minority group under the Race Relations Act, 1976 (amended 2000); the Human Rights Act 1998; and the Equality Act 2010. Some Travellers of Irish heritage identify as Pavee or Minceir, which are words from the Irish Traveller language, Shelta.

Bulgaria has also included Roma children in its Child Guarantee National Action Plan, recognising their vulnerability and the need for specific measures to improve their social inclusion. The government's strategy aims to provide Roma children with better access to education, healthcare, and protection services, ensuring they have equal opportunities to thrive. A good example coming from **Bulgaria** is the implementation of MOGA programme (Model of Early Education, Care and Active Participation) which is an innovative approach to Roma community development that supports Roma parents during the critical period of early childhood.

In **Italy** in 2024, Fondazione L'Albero della Vita launched a new ESF+ Social Innovation+ initiative to enhance the socio-economic inclusion of Roma children and young people, along with other marginalised groups. The PRODIGY (PROmoting Digital and Green skills for Youth) project aims to equip 240 NEETs (children and young people not in education, employment, or training) in Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria with essential skills to improve their access to the labor market and encourage active civic participation, with a particular focus on Roma children, migrants, and those with disabilities.

At the European level, the European Commission has taken steps to pressure national governments to address discrimination against Roma children. Here relevant is the already mentioned case of **Slovakia**, for example, where the Commission has pursued legal action to force the government to take meaningful steps towards desegregating Roma students in schools. Such efforts highlight the need for continued advocacy and policy enforcement to protect the rights of Roma children and ensure their full inclusion in society.

Over the past decade, rising housing costs have outpaced salaries in many places across Europe, making it increasingly difficult for families with children, including Roma families, to secure stable and adequate housing. This crisis directly contributes to child poverty, for example in **Spain**, where families are forced to spend more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgages. As a result, currently in **Spain**, 50% of those living in insecure housing, including shanty towns—are under the age of 16.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges outlined in the report, the following recommendations focus on addressing **education, poverty and social exclusion, housing and environmental inequality, and social protection** for Roma children.

1. Combat School Segregation and Improve Educational Opportunities

Roma children face **persistent segregation, discrimination, and lack of access to quality education** in multiple European countries. To address this, governments should:

- **Enforce desegregation policies** and actively monitor compliance in all schools. National governments, in collaboration with the **European Commission and local education authorities**, should take **action** against schools and municipalities that continue to segregate Roma students.

- **Ensure equal access to early childhood education** by increasing investment in **preschool programmes** that specifically target Roma communities.
- **Provide financial incentives and scholarships** for Roma children to continue their education beyond primary school. Many Roma children drop out due to economic hardship; **conditional cash transfers or free school meal programmes** could reduce this barrier.
- **Train teachers in anti-discrimination practices and culturally responsive education** to ensure Roma students feel welcome and included in the classroom.
- **Ensure language support for Roma children** who may not speak the national language at home, including hiring **bilingual educators** in key regions.

2. Tackle Roma Child Poverty and Social Exclusion

Roma children are disproportionately affected by **poverty and exclusion**, with many lacking access to social services. To address this, national and EU authorities should:

- **Increase social assistance and income support** for Roma families, ensuring that **welfare benefits reach the most marginalised households**. This should be accompanied by **employment programmes for Roma parents** to improve family income levels.
- **Monitor funding initiatives** such as the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** to ensure targeted investment supporting **Roma children's**, including healthcare, nutrition, and social inclusion.
- **Improve access to social services**, including mental health and counselling support, ensuring **culturally competent service providers** are available in Roma communities.
- **Strengthen the implementation of National Action Plans** for the European Child Guarantee by ensuring disaggregated data on Roma children, enabling proper **allocation** and **monitoring** of dedicated resources.

3. Improve Housing Conditions and Address Environmental Inequality

Roma families frequently **live in segregated, substandard housing** and experience **environmental inequality**, with limited access to clean water, safe housing, and proper sanitation. To address this, governments should:

- **Prevent forced evictions** of Roma families and **ensure access to legal housing protections**. Local authorities should prioritise **affordable, non-segregated housing solutions**.
- **Upgrade Roma neighbourhoods with essential infrastructure**, including **running water, proper sanitation, and electricity** to improve living conditions and child well-being.
- **Provide financial support for Roma families to access rental markets**, helping them move away from **segregated and environmentally hazardous areas**.
- **Guarantee equal access** to clean air, water, and public health resources for Roma communities. National governments should incorporate environmental justice

policies into Roma inclusion strategies to address and prevent disproportionate environmental risks.

4. Strengthen Legal and Social Protections for Roma Children

Discrimination and marginalisation are **deeply entrenched**, requiring **strong legal frameworks and proactive social policies**. Governments of Member States and the EU should:

- **Enact and enforce anti-discrimination laws** to protect Roma children from racism in schools, healthcare, and social services.
- **Increase accountability for governments** that fail to address Roma exclusion. The **European Commission should impose penalties** on member states that do not comply with desegregation mandates, as seen in Slovakia's case.
- **Ensure Roma children's voices are included** in policy making. Governments should **involve Roma-led organisations** in decision-making processes to ensure policies reflect community needs.
- **Expand legal aid services** to help Roma families **challenge housing discrimination, employment exclusion, and school segregation**.
- **Strengthen national Roma inclusion strategies** with clear, measurable goals and mandatory EU reporting, ensuring alignment with the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the European Child Guarantee for a more comprehensive approach.

5. Increase Public Awareness and Address Social Stigma

Anti-Roma sentiment remains high in many European countries, contributing to **exclusion, discrimination, and policy neglect**. Governments, civil society organisations, and media institutions should:

- **Launch public awareness campaigns** to challenge stereotypes and promote **positive representations of Roma communities**.
- **Educate all children about inclusion** through school curricula, ensuring **lessons include Roma history and culture**.
- **Strengthen legislation to ensure that local and national media outlets** do not **spread discriminatory narratives** about Roma people and instead focus on **stories of integration, success, and contributions**.

Summary

While some initiatives have been introduced to support Roma children, **many EU governments have failed to implement meaningful, lasting change**. **Education** remains a key area of concern, with **segregation still prevalent**, and social exclusion continues to affect Roma communities across Europe. **Poverty** remains a central issue, with Roma children facing higher rates of material deprivation and exclusion compared to their peers. The difficulties in accessing healthcare, housing, and adequate social services further

exacerbates their vulnerability. In many areas, Roma children live in poor housing conditions, with limited access to clean water and sanitation, and are exposed to environmental challenges, impacting their health and well-being.

Despite these challenges, some countries have implemented EU-funded initiatives and social protection programs aimed at strengthening the rights of Roma children. These efforts focus on improving access to education, healthcare, and social services while promoting greater social inclusion.

Without **stronger legal enforcement, community-driven initiatives, and sustained financial investment**, the disparities faced by Roma children will continue to grow. Governments must **move beyond policy rhetoric** and take **concrete action** to ensure that Roma children **have equal opportunities, access to quality education, and protections against discrimination**.

By **investing in desegregation efforts** European countries can **break vicious cycles of intergenerational exclusion and create a fairer society** for Roma children.

Eurochild urges policymakers to **ensure Roma inclusion is a priority in national and EU-level strategies**, advocating for **inclusive education, targeted anti-poverty measures, and stronger anti-discrimination policies**.

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