



Eurodiaconia  Connecting faith and social justice through action

ADDRESSING BARRIERS FOR ROMA TO ACCESS EMPLOYMENT

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

Mission

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

Vision

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

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INTRODUCTION

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice. Together our membership represents the needs and unique experiences of 58 national and regional organisations in 32 European countries.

Many Eurodiaconia members work extensively with historically marginalised groups, including Roma communities, through the provision of social services, assistance to access the labour market, education, and more. The full inclusion of Roma people necessitates their involvement in quality employment, a multi-faceted challenge that is hampered by long-standing antigypsyism and exclusion from mainstream education.

According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in their [2021 Roma survey of 10 countries](#), on average, 43 % of Roma aged 20 to 64 were in paid work in 2021 – that is, in full-time work, in part-time work, doing ad hoc jobs, in self-employment or occasional work – or had worked in the past four weeks. They also report that overall, the situation has not changed since 2016. Furthermore, only 28 % of Roma women aged 20 to 64 are in employment in comparison with 58 % of Roma men.

The current EU policy framework for Roma inclusion, the Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020-2030 highlights access to employment as one of its priority areas. The implementation of this framework through National Roma Strategic Frameworks provides an opportunity to enact meaningful change in the area of employment for Roma people.

In this report, we outline the barriers to access employment for Roma people, best practice examples from our membership, and recommendations for the EU and national level to better facilitate Roma access to the labour market and quality employment. It is our ambition that this report can inform the successful implementation of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks and the assessment of the implementation of the policies proposed and carried out within the frameworks.

BARRIERS PREVENTING ROMA ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

The primary barriers preventing people from Roma background to access employment include lack of education and skills, antigypsyism and discrimination, and lack of structural support and active inclusion to access the labour market. In the following paragraphs, these barriers are further explored. It is important to note that many Roma people have achieved high levels of professional success and have worked tirelessly to overcome systemic antigypsyism and other barriers, but that our focus here is on those who, due to historical marginalisation and systemic barriers, have less opportunity afforded to them. Therefore, our proposed solutions and best practices do not only target individual access to the labour market but propose structural solutions to combatting systems that have deep-rooted antigypsyism and the practices that uphold these systems.

1. Access to education

In our policy paper [Roma Child Poverty and Social Exclusion](#) (2021), we explore the educational segregation that has been implemented in many EU countries and resulted in low educational attainment of Roma children and youth. It is vital that children receive access to quality and integrated education to later be able to find quality employment. In the Czech Republic, our member Diaconia ECCB reports that Roma children are often placed in segregated primary schools. Once they reach the level of high school, they are unable to adapt to non-segregated schools, and many drop out within the first few months. The high rate of early school leaving of Roma children needs to be addressed from the earliest level, through early childhood education, non-segregated primary school, and inclusive educational settings where both Roma and non-Roma children are taught the value of Roma culture and heritage. Furthermore, holistic support systems, including after-school programmes, youth workers, and family support, are necessary to aid in the educational attainment of Roma children.

The acquisition of skills and ability to access the labour market is highly dependent on education. Early school leaving results in a high level of Roma youth NEETs (neither in education, employment, or training). While the EU is committed to increasing the number of people across Europe who partake in training or upskilling, they have set no specific targets under the Social Pillar Action Plan for Roma who take part in these trainings. It is likely that those targeted for upskilling training to accomplish the goals set by the Social Pillar Action Plan will be those already in employment, or in highly paid employment, as they are easier to reach. To reach Roma youth who are not in education, employment, or training, targeted outreach with anti-discriminatory practices must be established by public employment services and other stakeholders.

2. Labour exploitation and informal employment

Low levels of skills and education can also lead to exploitative work conditions or experiences of trafficking. Traffickers prey on vulnerabilities and target groups like Roma who are socially and economically marginalised, luring them in with promises of stable jobs and salaries, both domestically and abroad. The trafficking of Roma men, women, and children into labour or sexual exploitation throughout Europe is a phenomenon directly linked to the labour market exclusion faced by Roma. Targeting the underlying vulnerabilities to trafficking is essential, but these measures must be complemented by awareness raising in Roma communities about indicators and risks of trafficking and cultural and gender-sensitive victim reception services. It is also important to train police to work with victims of human trafficking, as many Roma have well-founded distrust of police and may require intermediaries to cooperate with legal proceedings against traffickers.

This lack of trust is one reason that lead many Roma to work in the informal sector. This is also because they cannot find employment in the formal labour market, have better social networks within informal employment, and because of physical distance to formal employment for those living in so-called settlements. Many of our members report that Roma people who utilise their services often have better chances of finding employment in the informal labour market. However, this makes it difficult for them in the long term when it comes to having a pension and other forms of social security.

3. Indebtedness

Another factor that perpetuates unemployment in Roma communities is exemplified by an example from our Czech member, Diaconia ECCB. They report that high levels of debt in Roma communities, as well as other people living in poverty, prevent them from accessing the labour market due to the unemployment benefits they receive being higher than salaries provided by minimum wage jobs, from which a percentage of their salaries would be automatically withheld to pay against their debts. Our member in Romania, Federatia Filantropia, provided a similar example, which is the cost involved in travelling to work at minimum wage jobs which are equal or lower to the amount they would receive from unemployment and other forms of social welfare. In these cases, the clear solution is to prioritise policies that “make work pay.” Adequate minimum wage policies, including minimum standards set at the EU level, and policies that work with and not against people in debt are essential to increasing labour market participation of Roma people and others living in debt or geographically far from employment opportunities.

4. Antigypsyism

Antigypsyism, the specific form of racism against Roma people, manifests in the refusal of employers to hire Roma, relegation of Roma to low-skilled employment, and lack of opportunity for Roma people to progress in their careers. Research by our member Deaconess Foundation in Finland under the [Roma Gate Project](#) showed that CVs with a Roma name are less likely to be selected by employers in Finland than non-Roma names with the same qualifications. The FRA survey on Roma confirms this, as they report that every third Roma older than 16 experienced discrimination due to being Roma when looking for work in the last 12 months. Roma people may also be paid less than their majority-culture colleagues, face harassment and hate speech, and passed over for jobs or promotions they are qualified for. Antigypsyism has historically manifested in geographical segregation, a key element to consider in access to employment. Many Roma live in settlements that only have informal and low-paying jobs available. Finding a job or housing in a non-segregated area is prevented by lack of finances, discrimination on the housing market, and well-founded fear of leaving tight-knit communities to move to a place surrounded by people that often have discriminatory attitudes against Roma people. It is therefore essential for EU and national labour-related policy to be anti-discriminatory, underpinned by anti-discriminatory measures and affirmative actions.



Picture by Deaconess Foundation, 2022

5. Intersectional barriers

People with Roma ethnic background often face intersectional barriers to accessing the labour market. For example, our members note that Roma women are especially far from the labour market, due to cultural expectations of motherhood and the intersecting discrimination against Roma and women. People with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other forms of historical marginalisation also play into how Roma people are discriminated against in education, employment, and other areas of life. These intersectional barriers also have practical implications. Women are often primary caregivers for children and elderly family members and find it difficult to fit formal employment into irregular caregiving activities. Roma people with disabilities may not be provided accommodations in education, employment, and trainings, and may be relegated to unemployment or low-paid jobs.

The dynamic interplay of antigypsyism and vicious cycle of poverty and low educational and labour market attainment result in tremendous barriers for many Roma people to access quality employment. In the next section, we put forward best practice examples from our members and policy solutions.

THE ROLE OF NON-PROFIT SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Our members, as non-profit social service providers, provide services for people who typically fall through the gaps in traditional social services. For example, people who find themselves furthest from the labour market, including long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, and migrants and refugees. There is a need for NGOs to provide this support due to the limited capacity to provide targeted support available from Public Employment Services and other actors. Long-term, intensive support is in many countries done by NGOs who have longstanding expertise running complex social enterprises and training programmes.

However, our members report a shrinking space for civil society in services providing access to employment due to lack of funding. They specifically identify a lack of long-term funding for projects and services that assist Roma and other vulnerable groups to access quality employment. Short projects that allow for targeted interventions to increase Roma employment are typical, but their utility is limited, as it takes a significant period to overcome the complex barriers that many Roma face in accessing employment. It is only through long-term, targeted programmes that our members report the greatest success.

Across the board, there is a noted lack of political will to tackle high levels of Roma unemployment. Racist attitudes, including incorrect assumptions of Roma “not wanting to work” or preferring begging that prevents the development of policies, programmes, and funding that would target the true causes of low employment amongst Roma communities. Combatting negative societal stereotypes is essential to increase political will and create lasting change.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

In consultation with our members, we have compiled best practice and policy solutions for the labour market inclusion of Roma communities. These include micro-loans, up-skilling programmes, and labour market inclusion of EU mobile citizens, many of whom are Roma that participate in our members programmes. These best practices also include reflective social work and advocacy practices, and the development of an understanding of more rights-based, holistic, and empowerment-focused understanding of social inclusion.



Pictures by Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, 2022

Our member in Serbia, [Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation](#), works with Roma communities with a holistic approach to meet the variety of needs experienced by Roma people living in situations of poverty. One of the successful programmes they run provides loans for people to start up small businesses, training on how to manage the technical, legal, and administrative aspects of entrepreneurship, and follow-up assistance through mentorship and advanced courses. The development of successful small businesses in communities with limited job opportunities in turn can result in the employment of even more people in the small business. These businesses also add value to their communities, for example, the creation of a small restaurant in one Roma settlement was exciting to the local community, because they no longer had to travel to a larger city to go to a restaurant. Within the “basic” economic empowerment programme that 60 individuals took part in, 80% have been assessed as very sustainable despite disruptions brought about by the pandemic and 78% of participants have increased their income by a minimum of €1000 per year, which has supplemented their welfare payments and allowed for increased self-confidence and motivation to continue to pursue employment and entrepreneurship.

[Deaconess Foundation](#) in Finland works with Roma youth and Roma who have migrated to Finland to assist them in accessing the labour market. As previously mentioned, their clients have encountered significant barriers in accessing the labour market due to discrimination. One role of Deaconess Foundation is mediating between companies and potential employees and vouching for them and their skills. While this act of bridging the gap between employers and employees is helpful in several respects, the need for intermediaries underlines the extent of antigypsyism at a structural level. Deaconess Foundation is also part of the [Labour Pool Initiative](#), a social enterprise that was funded to provide employment for Roma migrants.

[Diakonie Württemberg](#), member of Diakonie Deutschland works with Roma, particularly in the Danube region, and partners with the Umbrella Organisation of the German Minority of Sinti and Roma in Baden-Württemberg. They also collaborate with organisations in neighbouring countries, from where many Roma migrate to Germany. In recent years, they have become particularly concerned with the lack of systematic change in the lives of Roma individuals and communities, partly due to the forms of humanitarian aid that were being delivered, instead of long-term, sustainable projects and solutions. They are in the process of shifting their work towards sustainable practices, by prioritising empowerment of ethnic minorities and creating relationships with local politicians and institutions. They have also developed training courses on racism and discrimination for social workers and other diaconal actors and have a project offering low-threshold counselling and assistance in Stuttgart for Roma who migrated to Germany. Part of this change in mindset is a reflection on their own role as

social service providers and the lack of Roma social workers in Germany. Employment of more Roma people as social workers would serve to not only be an avenue of employment for Roma people and as a career trajectory for Roma youth but would also create more political and social participation of Roma as actors and representatives of their communities.

Despite the success of these projects, our members readily admit that they have seen limited improvement over the past decades in assisting Roma people to access employment. This is primarily due to lack of structural and policy changes at the national and EU level that do not embed employment policy in intersectional frameworks and do not consider other social policy areas (i.e. housing) adequately in employment policy. It is also because individual and small-group interventions are highly intensive, costly, and involve working against political and societal attitudes towards Roma. There is a lack of EU, national, and local funding that can be used for employment projects. It will take concerted effort across society, politicians, and communities to fully address the social exclusion of Roma and to create meaningful change. In the next section, we outline policy recommendations to facilitate this change, with the acknowledgement that what is most needed to exact sustainable solutions is political and societal will and intolerance of all forms of racism.



Pictures by Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, 2022

Recommendations

Below we outline recommendations for inclusion of Roma people into the labour market at the EU and national level. While responsibility for employment and social policy lies primarily with Member States, the EU plays an important role in supporting, aligning, and complementing the efforts of national governments. Through coordination and monitoring of national policies, as well as the promotion of best practices, the EU can contribute in several ways to Roma labour market inclusion.

1. Promote participation and active inclusion
 - a. EU institutions and Member States should ensure the participation of Roma people in development, implementation, and monitoring of all policies related to the labour market.
 - b. EU institutions should model affirmative action employment policies in their employment practices to increase the number of ethnic and other minorities on staff.
 - c. The Reinforced Youth Guarantee and Erasmus Plus should be utilised to include Roma youth in education and training, with an emphasis on cultivating Roma youth's political and civic engagement.

2. Active outreach
 - a. The EU should encourage active outreach measures to Roma and other groups who are far from the labour market, through the promotion of scholarships for Roma students and employees in education and training and elevating the role of public employment services.
 - b. Public Employment Services need to be inclusive and accessible services, where equal and universal access is guaranteed for all people irrespective of ethnic background. They must also be a safe space free from bias and any form of discrimination. For this, they would benefit from an improved intersectional perspective in their work and training of employees on the rights conferred by EU citizenship and the needs of EU mobile citizens.
 - c. The EU institutions should enable access to reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning, which create the foundation for more inclusive labour markets, targeting those with the lowest skills and who are furthest from the labour market.

- d. The EU should encourage Member States to tackle low employment in Roma segregated settlements, utilising recommendations in the European Parliament's recently adopted [resolution on the situation of Roma people living in settlements in the EU](#).
3. Spotlight on intersectionality and structural racism
 - a. European Institutions and Member States should mainstream an intersectional approach in all policies related to employment, social enterprises, education, and upskilling and implement policy action to decrease the barriers faced by people with multiple intersectional vulnerabilities to access employment.
 - b. The revision of the Racial Equality Directive should include an intersectional approach and go beyond addressing individual acts of discrimination, moving towards addressing structural racism and discrimination on the labour market.
 - c. EU policies should promote the inclusion into the labour market of Roma women, who often serve as caretakers, through setting ambitious Barcelona targets on childcare, the availability of affordable and accessible long-term care, and flexible family-friendly employment policies.
4. Monitoring employment, education, and training
 - a. The revised Social Scoreboard should include sub-targets for participation in training under the European Pillar of Social Rights for Roma and other identified groups who have experienced exclusion from the labour market.
 - b. Equality bodies mandates should be clarified and strengthened by creating legally binding standards for equality bodies that include a mandate to cover all forms of discrimination on and off the labour market and sufficient funds and powers to adequately perform their duties.
5. Minimum wages and income
 - a. The directive on adequate minimum wages should be implemented by Member States as a minimum standard, bearing in mind that low minimum wages perpetuate unemployment by not providing an attractive enough alternative to welfare benefits.
 - b. Minimum income should be adequate and sufficient to live and regularly updated and indexed to account for inflation and rising cost of living.
 - c. Take-up of social welfare benefits should be improved by decreasing administrative burden and further research into the low take-up of social welfare.

- d. Member States should allow for side incomes beyond social welfare, to allow for Roma to take up work without losing their primary source of income.
6. Debt prevention and alleviation
- a. The European Commission should propose minimum standards for debt settlement, discourage the garnishing of wages, regulate the use of revolving credit card balances, and encourage simplifying access to social security mechanisms.
 - b. Member States should end punitive debt policies that prevent people in debt from seeking employment and should instead provide financial counselling and incentives for people in debt to work.
7. Promoting and investing in social economy
- a. The EU should monitor and share best practice examples of the active inclusion of Roma in the labour market, with particular attention to the social economy.
 - b. The EU and Member States should promote an enabling environment for social economy, particularly for WISE (Work Integrating Social Enterprises) through implementing the recommendations made in Eurodiaconia's [Social Economy Action Plan consultation response](#).
 - c. The use of EU funding programmes such as ERDF, ESF+ and InvestEU should be maximized for the social economy sector.
8. Funding
- a. Funding under ESF+ should be allocated towards specific services, such as social labour market programmes, job coaching, and flexible skills programmes for those furthest from the labour market.
 - b. Member States should ensure the continuation of successful pilot projects funded by the EU on access to employment for Roma in order to create sustainable, long-term change.
 - c. Local and national funding should be allocated towards successful projects promoting the education and employment of Roma.



Picture by Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, 2022

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