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WP2:

Action 2.3

Summary Reports of Outreach Strategy for Roma Learners



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Introduction

Across the five countries, Austria, Germany, Greece, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria, the educational and vocational inclusion of Roma communities remains a pressing concern, shaped by demographic trends, systemic barriers, and varying degrees of policy engagement.

Austria faces challenges in quantifying its Roma population due to the absence of official census data, though estimates suggest between 30,000 and 50,000 individuals, many of whom are Austrian citizens. The community is notably young, yet educational attainment is low, with only 28% of Roma youth completing upper secondary education. This gap translates into limited employment prospects, compounded by systemic discrimination and cultural disconnects. Survey data reveal moderate awareness of VET programs, but also highlight barriers such as financial constraints and lack of information.

Germany's Roma and Sinti population is estimated between 70,000 and 140,000, though statistical data on education remain scarce. While some progress has been made since the 1980s, Roma learners continue to be disadvantaged, with high dropout rates and low representation in secondary and higher education. Interest in VET is strong, especially in sectors offering stable employment, but discrimination and financial hardship persist, with over 60% of respondents reporting exclusion from education or training.

In Greece, the Roma population is both sizable and youthful, with nearly half under the age of 15. Despite this demographic potential, Roma communities face socioeconomic barriers and cultural attitudes that devalue formal education. A staggering 63% of young Roma are classified as NEET, and challenges such as school segregation and social isolation contribute to high dropout rates. Awareness of VET programs is relatively high, and many view them as a pathway to employment and entrepreneurship, though financial barriers remain significant.



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North Macedonia presents a more structured data landscape, with official census figures listing 46,433 Roma, though estimates suggest the real number may be much higher. The community is predominantly young, and while education is officially free, hidden costs and systemic exclusion continue to drive dropout rates. Survey responses indicate moderate awareness of VET programs and strong belief in their potential to improve job prospects. Stakeholders emphasize the need for policy reforms and greater inclusivity in existing programs.

Bulgaria's Roma population is estimated at around 750,000, making up over 10% of the national population. The community is youthful, with children under 14 comprising 26%. However, access to quality education remains deeply unequal. Between 44% and 70% of Roma students attend segregated schools, and preschool enrollment rates are significantly lower than those of the majority population. Only a quarter of Roma youth complete secondary education, with dropout driven by economic hardship, family responsibilities, and language barriers. While awareness of VET programs is high and many believe in their potential to improve employment outcomes, cost remains the most significant barrier to participation.

Together, these national profiles reveal a shared urgency: while Roma communities across Europe express clear interest in vocational education and training, systemic exclusion, financial constraints, and cultural barriers continue to hinder access and success. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated policy efforts, inclusive outreach, and sustained investment in equitable education pathways.

Outreach strategy conducted in the partner countries

AUSTRIA

The lack of official census data makes it difficult to determine the precise number of Roma in Austria, with an estimate that the number of Roma in Austria ranges between 30,000 and 50,000, with a considerable share of them being citizens of Austria. The Roma population in Austria tends to have a younger demographic profile, and factors such as higher birth rates among them contribute to this trend. The Roma community in Austria is a cluster of different bands, each with its particular origin. One of the oldest groups is the autochthonous Roma, officially recognized as an Austrian national minority.

When it comes to education, European-level data indicate that only 28% of Roma youth complete upper secondary education, compared to 83.5% among the general population (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020). When left without secondary education, they are



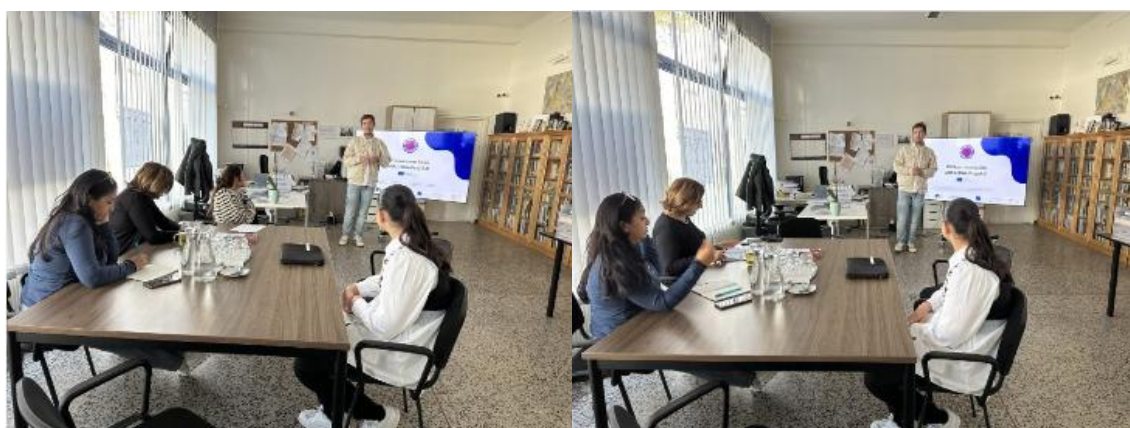
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more likely to experience unemployment or precarious jobs. In Austria, employment rates for youth without upper secondary education are only 59%, compared to 85% for those with these qualifications (OECD, 2023). Roma learners encounter multiple barriers: systemic discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, cultural disconnect, Cultural Disconnect and students leave school before completing lower secondary education, and barely 18% of them can finish their high school education.

According to the survey results from Austria, 58.06% of respondents were aware of vocational education and training programs, while 41.94% were not familiar with VET opportunities, highlighting a need for greater outreach and awareness campaigns targeting Roma communities. Respondents also identified several barriers to participating in VET programs, such as: lack of information, financial constraints, distance to training centers, and cultural and language Barriers.



Conclusion:

The interviews and roundtable discussions with both the Roma youth and the experts from Romano Centro revealed several critical insights into the needs and challenges of the Roma community in Austria. The importance of addressing language barriers, financial difficulties, and lack of motivation emerged as central themes. The inclusion of Roma youth in educational programs can be significantly improved by focusing on mentorship, financial support, and enhanced communication with families. These insights will be invaluable in shaping the direction of the Miranda project and in refining the outreach strategies to better serve Roma learners in Austria.



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GERMANY

The Roma and Sinti population in Germany according to the Council of Europe source ranges from 70 000 to 140 000. Due to the difficulties of definition and lack of statistical surveys, there is no representative data available on the educational situation of the German Sinti and Roma. Based on a comparison of the results of the two studies, it is stated that the educational situation of German Sinti and Roma with German nationality has improved considerably since the 1980s (Brüggemann, Hornberg, & Jonuz, 2013, p. 104), but still remains below the German average.

Undoubtedly, the educational situation of the German Sinti and Roma differs and they can still be described as disadvantaged (compared to an average German citizen). Statistical data on the educational situation of the Roma population are not available. At around 19%, only a small group of the interviewed Roma has a professional degree. Around 44% left school without an educational certificate. Almost 11% – a considerably higher percentage than among pupils of the majority population – attended a special school (Förderschule) for pupils with severe learning and behavioral problems. With 13% attended no school at all. When it comes to secondary school and early leaving, the proportion of Roma youngsters who have attended secondary schools (12%) or high schools (2%) was considerably lower than that of youngsters of the majority population. 46% of those interviewed did not get any support from their families for school homework.

Taking in consideration the collected data survey, Roma learners demonstrated a clear demand for the VET programs, and that should be accessible, showing a clear interest in different skills, most focused on sectors offering steady job prospects, skills on IT and digital, healthcare, plumbing, technical skills, logistics, graphic design and administration. A very high percentage have faced discrimination when trying to access education or training, in total 61.9% of the responders, and all of them believe that financial assistance makes it easier for them to enroll in VET programs.



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Conclusion:

Roma learners in VET need stronger support through intercultural training for trainers, administrators, and employers on Roma history and discrimination, closer cooperation between VET centers, schools, Roma NGOs, and Jobcenter to ensure coordinated guidance, and preparatory bridging courses, literacy support, and individualized learning plans tailored to diverse backgrounds. Parents should receive help navigating education and employment systems through workshops in easy German or Romanes, while special attention is needed at critical dropout points such as switching schools, leaving Hauptschule, or turning 18. Finally, promoting VET opportunities and careers can motivate Roma youth by showing them realistic and inspiring pathways.

GREECE

The Roma population in Greece represents a largely vulnerable social group with significant variations, whereas the Greek government officially recognizes approximately 300,000 Roma individuals, but independent studies and NGO reports suggest figures ranging from 180,000 to 365,000. Despite their significant presence, this group often remains underrepresented in national discussions about social inclusion and policy development. The Roma population in Greece is notably youthful. The average age of



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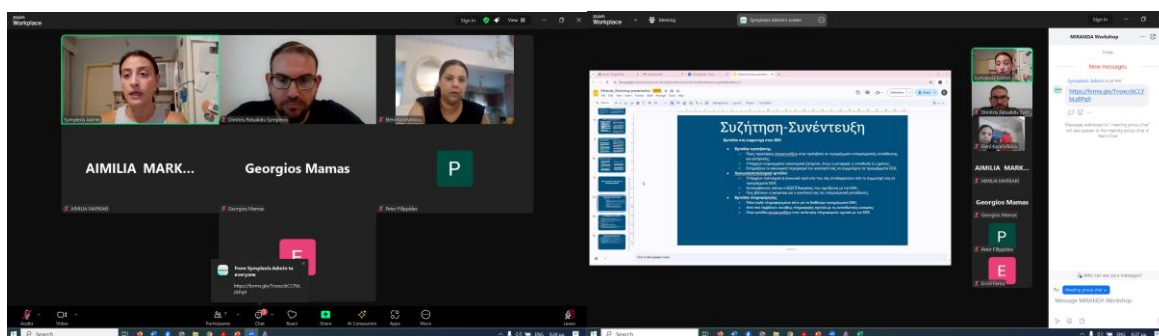
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Roma individuals is 21.56 years, significantly lower than the national average of 42.2 years. Approximately 43.39% of the Roma community is under 15 years old, while only 1.6% are aged 65 and older. The most common factors they face are socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, and cultural attitudes, discouraging families from valuing formal education.

When it comes to education, especially secondary education, attainment directly impacts employment opportunities for Roma individuals. With about 63% of young Roma classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), they are more prone to limited job opportunities and face discrimination in hiring. Accessing secondary education for Roma students is met with rough challenges, like segregation in schools, cultural misunderstandings, and social isolation, which leads to higher dropout rates of Roma learners.

But a significant majority (70%) of participants reported being aware of VET programs. Participating in VET is met with financial barriers, which were the most significant concern, with 60% indicating that costs associated with VET programs hindered their participation. Most respondents expected that completing a VET program would lead to better employment prospects, higher income, personal development, and, for some, the opportunity to start their own businesses.



Conclusion:

The insights gathered from these stakeholder interviews highlight both the significant barriers faced by Roma learners in accessing VET programs and the potential pathways for improvement through targeted initiatives. By addressing financial constraints, enhancing career counselling services, promoting cultural sensitivity among educators, and fostering community engagement, stakeholders can create a more inclusive educational landscape that better serves the needs of Roma students.



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NORTH MACEDONIA

The official 2021 census recorded 46,433 people who identified as Roma in N. Macedonia (State Statistical Office, 2022). However, most experts agree this number is too low, while the Council of Europe estimates the number is around 197,000 (Council of Europe, 2022). Other groups working on Roma rights suggest the number could be between 120,000 and 260,000 (European Roma Rights Centre, 2022). According to various reports, a large number of people are under 25 years old. For instance, above 40.0% of the community is under the age of 15 (UNDP, 2022). This data is different from the national average age, which is calculated to be above 39 years (State Statistical Office, 2022).

When it comes to education, which is free of charge in North Macedonia, the costs related to education remain high. Still, the drop-out rate among Roma students remains a persistent problem and not just because of one single reason, but rather due to intersectional barriers, such as systemic, social, and economic exclusion that contribute to Roma being excluded from education.

According to the received responses, the feedback shows that there is a demand for VET programs and they are connected to employment needs, requiring skills of interest focused on the job, making them better candidates in the job market. Regarding their previous knowledge about the (VET) programs, based on the received responses, we can see that 60% of them are aware, but 40% are not. Half of the respondents indicated that they strongly agree that VET programs can improve job prospects, while the other half selected agree and/or neutral. From the stakeholder answers to the question, “What are the most significant barriers to Roma learners accessing VET programs,” in their opinion, we can see that 20% of them believe that discrimination and stigma, lack of access to quality education, low awareness of VET opportunities, and the other 20% responded to be financial constraints. However, the majority of the stakeholders, in fact, 60% of them, agreed that some policy changes were needed, also 80% of them indicated that current VET programs are somewhat inclusive, while only 20% of them selected YES as a clear answer to that question.



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Conclusion

The issues are systemic, and they require systemic changes to be made by various key stakeholders. There must also be institutional support given to VET programs and the people involved to further build them methodologically and pedagogically. There should be financial support. Therefore, it was pointed out that a partnership between institutions was a crucial step into making programs more effective and continual. It is very important to build trust-based partnerships that actually understand the needs of the Roma community. For this to be achieved, the involvement/inclusion of Roma mentors and mediators, members of Ngos, was pointed out as a key factor.

The stakeholders proposed actionable, systemic changes, such as advocating for dedicated funding lines for preparatory courses, Roma mediators, and holistic student support packages. Institutions must actively "audit and adapt curricula" for cultural relevance and review all policies.

BULGARIA

The 2011 census in Bulgaria recorded approximately 325,343 Roma individuals, accounting for 4.9% of the population. However, according the newest data, the Council of Europe estimates that 750,000 Roma are living in Bulgaria, referring to 10.33% of the population. The Roma population in Bulgaria is notably youthful. Children under the age of 14 comprise 26% of the Roma population.



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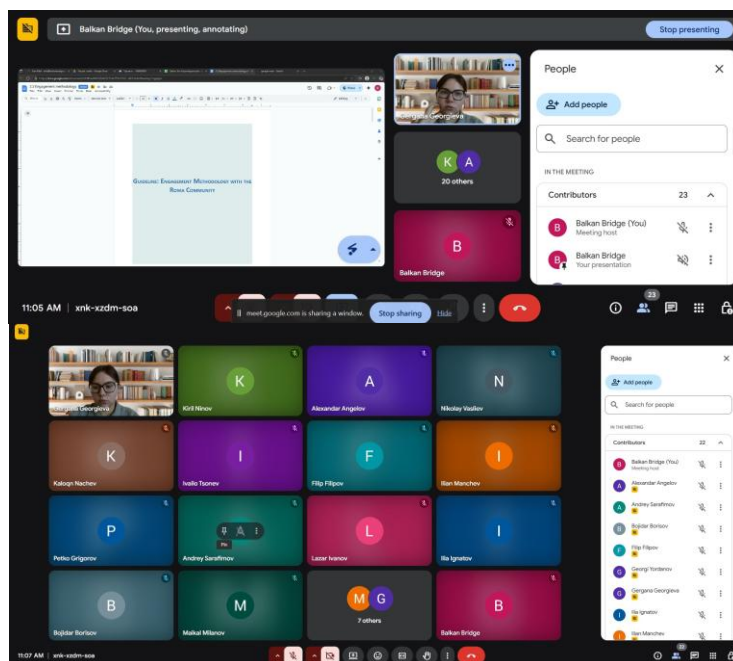
When it comes to education, access to quality education for Bulgarian Roma is still of great concern, as there are many disparities compared to the general population. According to the European Commission's 'Education and Training Monitor 2016' report, the number of early school dropouts among Roma has been increasing, a trend that disproportionately affects minority communities. Numbers testify that Between 44% and 70% of Roma students (approximately 44,000–70,000 children) attend segregated schools. The 2013 World Bank study found that only 38% of Roma girls and 42% of Roma boys enroll in preschool, compared to 75% of the majority population. Despite some improvements, only 21% of Roma women and 25% of Roma men between the ages of 16 and 24 have completed secondary education (ISCED3) or higher education. Main reasons for these numbers are segregation in Schools, Discrimination and bullying within the classrooms, and cultural differences: Many Roma parents have limited education themselves, making it difficult for them to support their children academically. Some of the Reasons for Drop-Out are: (i) many children quit school because they are engaged in the activities of the family, (ii) Daughters in the household look after their younger siblings, while the male siblings, work with their fathers (iii) Access to noncompulsory pre-school education is generally unavailable for Roma children, due to the required attendance fee, which many Roma families cannot afford. (iv) The poor quality of education received by Roma students in the lower levels (v) language barriers when attending mainstream schools can arise.

Regarding the VET programmes, the majority of respondents from the survey were aware of the VET programmes. Regarding the potential impact of such programmes on employment prospects, 70% believed that they could enhance their job opportunities. However, 55% of learners expressed a neutral stance on the quality of VET programs, while 40% rated them as good. The vast majority of respondents (95%) indicated that cost is a significant barrier to their participation in VET programs.



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Conclusion

The educational challenges faced by Roma in Bulgaria highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms to promote inclusion and equal opportunities. Segregation, discrimination, and economic hardship continue to hinder Roma learners, contributing to high dropout rates and limited employment prospects. Without targeted interventions, these disparities will persist and further entrench social exclusion. While most participants are aware of VET opportunities and see them as beneficial for job prospects, they express a need for more flexible programs, financial aid, and career counseling. Suggested improvements include offering separate classes for different levels, better materials, and tailored support. To reach the Roma community, effective outreach through social media, local organizations, and direct contact is crucial. Addressing these issues can help enhance Roma participation and success in vocational education. Stakeholders can play a crucial role in reducing barriers for Roma learners in VET programs. Key actions, including developing inclusive education policies specifically supporting Roma learners, adapting curricula to be culturally relevant and inclusive, eliminating discrimination, and creating inclusive learning environments.



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