

Research on
**Roma access to decent and sustainable
employment in Romania**

2024

Introduction

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Nevo Parudimos association it's a non-governmental organization funded in 2008 by a group of teachers, Roma activists and representatives from the Roma community which has the main aim to reduce the cultural, educational and economical differences in the society. Since the funding Nevo Parudimos was doing activities aiming to promote Roma inclusion and representation at all levels of the society.

The present research aims to bring up a comprehensive image about the status of Roma employment in Romania.

The research methodology it's based on two approaches:

Desk research:

- desk research about the national programs, legislation and institutions who refer to employment services and Roma employment in Romania

Interviews:

- Conduct 10 interviews with staff of the state employment office and with other stakeholders offering employment services in Romania about the implementation of this legislation/ programs from different counties in Romania
- Conduct 20 interviews with Roma who tried to access those services and find out the good and not so good aspects of those programs/ laws/ initiatives from different parts of Romania

The Roma in Romania face significant socio-economic challenges that have persisted for decades. They represent one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the country. High levels of poverty and unemployment are prevalent among the Roma population, largely due to limited access to quality education and discrimination in the labor market. Many Roma live in segregated communities with poor housing conditions, inadequate access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation, and limited healthcare facilities. This socio-economic exclusion perpetuates a cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Additionally, the Roma often encounter systemic discrimination and social exclusion, which exacerbate their economic hardships. Despite various governmental and non-governmental efforts to improve their situation, progress has been slow. Initiatives aimed at integrating the Roma into the broader society and economy have had limited success, partly due to persistent prejudice and insufficient implementation of policies. Consequently, the Roma community in Romania continues to struggle with significant barriers to achieving socio-economic equality.

Decent and sustainable employment is a cornerstone for Roma inclusion as it addresses both economic and social dimensions of their marginalization, paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive society which provides a stable source of income, essential for lifting Roma individuals and families out of poverty and at the same time foster their social inclusion and enhances the sense of dignity and self-worth among Roma individuals.

✓ **Where do the Roma work?**

According to National Institute of Statistics (NIS) Census 2021 (provisional results), on December 1 st 2021, 569,477 individuals of Roma ethnicity were registered, of which 290,760 were men and 278,717 were women. Out of the total of 569,477 individuals of Roma ethnicity, 12,365 (2.17%) have a high level of education, 85,850 have an average level of education (15.08%) and 471,262 (82.75) have a low level of education.

The employment situation of the Roma population in Romania is marked by significant disparities compared to the general population. According to a 2016 report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the employment rate among Roma in Romania is considerably lower than that of the non-Roma population. Some key statistics from various reports include:

- **Employment Rate:** The employment rate for Roma men is around 40%, while for Roma women, it is significantly lower at approximately 19%.
- **Unemployment Rate:** The unemployment rate among the Roma is high, with estimates ranging from 35% to 50%, depending on the source and methodology.
- **Gender Disparity:** Roma women face particularly high barriers to employment, with much lower employment rates compared to Roma men and non-Roma women.
- **Age and Education:** Young Roma (aged 15-24) experience very high levels of unemployment. Additionally, lower educational attainment among the Roma correlates with higher unemployment rates. Those with only primary education or no formal education at all are the most disadvantaged.

Roma individuals in Romania are predominantly engaged in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, often in the informal sector. Common sectors and types of employment include:

- **Agriculture:** A significant portion of Roma work in agriculture, often as seasonal laborers. These jobs are typically insecure, poorly paid, and lack formal contracts or benefits.
- **Construction:** Many Roma men find work in construction, again often on a temporary or informal basis.
- **Street Vending and Recycling:** Informal activities such as street vending, scrap metal collection, and recycling are common sources of income. These activities are part of the grey economy and provide minimal financial stability or security.
- **Service Sector:** Some Roma are employed in low-skilled service jobs, such as cleaning, maintenance, and domestic work. These positions are usually low-paying and may lack formal employment contracts.
- **Crafts and Artisanal Work:** Traditional crafts and artisanal work, including metalworking and pottery, remain important for some Roma communities, although these activities have declined in recent years.

When we speak about the type of contracts and employment type in the case of Roma the most known are:

- **informal employment:** a significant proportion of Roma employment is informal, lacking formal contracts, job security, or social benefits. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions.

- seasonal and atypical employment: many Roma rely on seasonal work, particularly in agriculture, which offers only temporary income. Atypical employment arrangements, such as day labor or casual work, are also common.
- migration for Work: some Roma migrate to other EU countries in search of better employment opportunities. However, they often face similar challenges abroad, including discrimination, low pay, and poor working conditions.

The employment situation of the Roma in Romania is characterized by high unemployment, significant gender disparities, and a reliance on informal, low-skilled work mainly due to low level of education.

✓ ***Are the Roma adequately supported to access employment?***

When it's about support offered to Roma for employment we can speak about two big initiatives: the one of the state put in practice by the national employment offices and the one of civil society organization.

When we speak about the National Employment services there is a specific attention given to Roma population and their access to employment services and support services for employment booth for individual people and for employers.

The supportive and tailored person-centred approach it's not present in the existing programs mostly due to lack of funds, lack of experience and training of the workers from the employment offices around the country and also due to a very centralised approach of the employment office: if you need support or a document from the employment office or if you want to register as a person seeking for a job you need to go at the offices of this institution and register using a set of procedures and documents which are very complicated and not understandable for some people.

There are very few the situations when we can speak about integrated individualised pathways which include access to counselling, training and financial support for the ones searching for a job (the integrated approach can be seen mainly in EU funded projects implemented by the employment office or different civil society NGO's).

The access to jobs it's a must/ an obligation to get the inclusion income¹ in Romania. According with the actual legislation a person who receive the minimum income in Romania it's obliged:

- to follow the active measures provided in the individualized mediation plan, established by the County Employment Agency (AJOFM) upon their registration as job seekers;
- to present themselves, whenever requested, at the office of the County Employment Agency (AJOFM) where they are registered as job seekers, for the purpose of employment or participation in services aimed at stimulating employment and professional training.

¹ In Romania, the "minimum income for inclusion" is regulated by **Law No. 196/2016 regarding the minimum income for inclusion**. This law was adopted to consolidate and streamline the system of social benefits for low-income individuals, replacing existing social assistance programs, such as social aid and the family support allowance, with a single benefit called the "minimum income for inclusion" (VMI).

At national level in Romania there is a special program on employment targeting Roma people: in each county there is a list of localities who has a deeper Roma focus and each county employment office has a person who has in his responsibilities also to focus on Roma. In those localities the employment office gives a bigger attention for Roma but they don't offer nothing extra (financial or other type of support). This it's a response to the legal framework about employment in Romania: The national Employment strategy and the National Roma Inclusion Strategy.

According with Employment agency experts in most of the cases they are not prepared to respond to the specific needs and situation of the Roma people and due to this most of the services offered are general, not adapted to the individual persons needs. So far in 2024 were employed 1399 persons in Caras Severin county out of which 91 were Roma.(P.G)

From the interviews we had with the staff of the employment agencies from Caras Severin county and Timis county and with the representatives of the trade unions from the area the staff of the national employment offices are not prepared to face such a complex situation as the Roma are facing and many times the requests of the people are not solved and the Roma are facing a huge bureaucracy, same which also the other people are facing just that in the case of Roma who have a very low level of education this have even a more negative impact (AM-Trade union).

✓ ***Can the Roma access income support while unemployed?***

There are no specific programs targeting Roma job seekers. Also Roma people can benefit from the general programs which the National Employment Office offer to all Romanian citizens:

- The unemployment support which any persons get it they have minimum 12 months in employment in the last 24 months. For this they need to go each month to receive a visa(stamp) from the employment office. (law nr.76/2002)²
- The relocation support which any person gets if they are changing address in order to get a job and move more than 50 KM (art.76 from law nr.76/2002)³
- The training programs offered by the national/ county employment office for all people who are searching for a job organised at county level or at regional/local level which after you register as a job seeking person you benefit free of them.⁴
- The inclusion income which it's the support offered by the stat for individuals or families according with law 196/2016 which aim to support the families which have heavy social problems. This contains a certain amount of money (very low – 102 EUR for one person or 70 EUR for a family member) and a set of facilities (health insurance). This support it's given based on an analysis and because the state can decide that if you own a certain list of goods to stop this support many times the support it's given trough discriminatory processes or decisions⁵. This income and also the

² <https://lege5.ro/gratuit/gm4tcmzr/indemnizatia-de-somaj-lege-76-2002?dp=gezdkobwg4yde>

³ <https://website.anofm.ro/stimularea-mobilitatii-prima-de-relocare/>

⁴ <https://website.anofm.ro/programe-de-formare-profesionala-pentru-persoanele-aflate-in-cautarea-unui-loc-de-munca/>

⁵ <https://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala/2-uncategorised/7122-20231208-vmi-ghid-plian-poster?showall=1>

unemployment support it's conditioned by some tasks which all beneficiary need to fulfil: to try to get a job and register to the employment office and to accept the jobs if they receive them, to attend a qualification or school, to do community work 8 days/month, to present proofs that they don't have other income.

All those rules and documentation makes very heavy for disadvantage Roma and non-Roma people to access those benefits. Many times, they refuse them due to the lack of knowledge to do the documents.

✓ ***Antigypsyism in accessing employment***

Officially according with institutional rules and national legislation there is no discrimination. According with the information's received from the interviews we made with Roma from Caras Severin and Timis county they address a certain level of discrimination "in my case it's not a problem because I'm more white skin but my brother he is always treated bad and need to go more times to institutions to receive a paper (C.C.- Roma man)

Many times, booth the people from employment agencies and employers have a discriminatory attitude towards Roma trough the fact that they offer them just the low paid jobs. "In the recruitment process I think that the discrimination comes from the fact that always if a Roma search for a job they present him just the low paid jobs and the ones without qualification, no mater what. They suppose from the beginning that Roma are low educated which its discriminatory" (OA- social worker).

When Nevo Parudimos open a social business on construction in order to proof that people were good and qualified to do the job fist we renovated two flats for free for the municipality and just after that they consider us to be contracted for that job.

"Most of the people which we tried to employ from our company (which was one insertion company we needed to provide explanation and convince the employers to let them proof that they can perform the tasks which was not needed for the ones who were not coming from us or the ones who were not Roma. Because of different stereotypes they have the employers discriminate Roma people" (CA-social worker).

✓ ***Adequate wages and the ethnic pay gap***

In Romania, disparities between the wages of Roma workers and non-Roma workers are rooted in broader social and economic inequalities. These differences are influenced by several factors, such as education levels, discrimination, employment types, and regional disparities.

From the educational and skills development perspective the Roma community in general, in Romania often faces limited access to education due to poverty, discrimination, and exclusion from the education system. As a result, many Roma individuals have lower levels of formal education and are more likely to work in low-skilled, informal, or seasonal jobs that pay lower wages.

From the type of employment perspective due to the fact that many Roma individuals are employed in the informal economy, where wages tend to be lower, unstable, and unregulated. They often work in sectors such as agriculture, construction, or street vending, where they may not receive the legal minimum wage or benefits such as health insurance or pensions.

Another factor which leads to a difference of wages its discrimination against Roma individuals. This affects their access to better-paying jobs. Employers may be less likely to hire Roma workers for skilled positions or may offer them lower wages compared to non-Roma employees for the same work.

“All people from our community employed by the municipality in their cleaning or green spaces company are paid with minimum wage no matter what position or education they have. ... Our neighbour the driver have same payment like the one without any education” (BI-Roma man)

✓ ***Sustainable contracts, employment rights, working conditions***

Roma workers are overrepresented in precarious contracts with poor employment rights and limited access to social security. They are more likely to work in informal, low-paid, and temporary jobs, which often lack legal protections such as health insurance or pensions. Roma individuals also tend to face poorer working conditions, including unsafe environments with limited adherence to health and safety regulations. These conditions are exacerbated by discriminatory practices, which limit their access to stable, secure employment and decent working standards.

“Due to the low level of skills and education Roma people usually are getting the low-quality jobs. Majority of the workers from the cleaning companies in the city are Roma. The working contracts are mostly similar, all people have same working contracts in those fields, no exception, they need to respect the minimum legal requirements” (AM- trade union representative)

“I tried more times to find a job for my son. But he is 18 and they don’t want him with contract only as daily worker. This it’s not good because he don’t have health insurance” (AD- Roma women).

✓ ***Access to on-the-job training and career progression***

Roma workers face significant barriers such as lower educational attainment, discrimination, and exclusion from formal employment sectors that typically offer professional development opportunities. A study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) - Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey⁶, found that Roma individuals often lack access to vocational training, which limits their ability to advance in their careers.

The access to training of the Roma its diminished by the low level of education they have. The Romanian legislation impose that people who want to attend a training they need to have a

⁶ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/second-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey-main-results>

certain level of education. This means that if you did not graduate high school or primary education you can't apply for a training which to support your career progression which its discriminatory to a certain level.

In many situations companies employ not qualified people and after they offer them a job training but in majority of the cases this training it's not to advance in their career its to manage to do their tasks.

The training of workers in last period was supported as support from the state trough the ESF funds and more companies used those money especially for digital skills or other skills needed to perform their tasks but also here in most of the cases the low paid jobs, people with a low level of education like majority of Roma were excluded from those trainings.

✓ ***Roma representation in trade union structures***

Roma workers in Romania are underrepresented in trade union structures, which limits their ability to advocate for their specific labor rights and concerns. This underrepresentation is particularly significant given that many Roma workers are employed in informal or precarious jobs where union membership is less common. As a result, their issues, such as poor working conditions, lack of job security, and discrimination, are often overlooked in collective bargaining processes. A major challenge who lead tho this is that Roma workers are often concentrated in sectors with low unionization rates and tend to fall outside the scope of formal union activities.

National trade unions rarely address Roma-specific issues directly, as their focus tends to be broader, and Roma workers are often in informal sectors where union membership is less common.

"From my knowledge we address discrimination in general and so far we did not had any Roma representative in the trade union I represent" (AM-representative of trade union).

✓ ***Antigypsyism and discrimination in employment***

Roma individuals face antigypsyism and discrimination in employment in Romania. This discrimination occurs at various levels—from employers, coworkers, clients, and partners—and is a major barrier to their integration in the labor market. Below are key points highlighting how this manifests in the workplace:

1. Employer Discrimination: employers often hold prejudiced views against Roma people, associating them with negative stereotypes. These biases lead to:
 - Refusal to hire Roma candidates, even when they are qualified.
 - Offering lower wages or fewer benefits compared to non-Roma employees for the same work.
 - Exclusion from managerial or skilled positions, restricting their career growth.

A report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)⁷ found that nearly 1 in 3 Roma in Europe, including Romania, felt discriminated against when looking for work

2. Discrimination from Coworkers and Clients: Roma workers also face discrimination from their coworkers and clients, leading to:

- Hostile work environments, where Roma employees are marginalized or harassed.
- Roma workers being treated as outsiders, excluded from social interactions, or assigned menial tasks, reinforcing their segregation within the workplace.

Due to these forms of discrimination, Roma workers find it difficult to access training and career progression opportunities, as employers may not see them as valuable employees to invest in. This lack of career development keeps them in low-wage jobs and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Antigypsyism in employment is also institutional, with Roma communities being overrepresented in precarious jobs and underrepresented in formal sectors. This leads to a lack of access to social security, labor protections, and formal contracts.

The National Council for Combating Discrimination in Romania has highlighted the prevalence of antigypsyism in various sectors, calling for greater enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in employment practices. However, enforcement remains a challenge due to deeply ingrained social biases.

“We cant force the employers to get them. They decide many times to bring foreign workers which they need to pay more than locals instead employing Roma or other disadvantage people from the city” OA- social worker.

Efforts to promote diversity in Romanian workplaces are limited, and employment equality legislation is not consistently enforced. While there are policies in place to combat discrimination, such as Romania’s Anti-Discrimination Law (ordinance 137/2000)⁸, the implementation and enforcement of these policies are often weak.

Since 2021 there is also the antigypsyism legislation (law no 2 from 2021)⁹ which started to be used together with Law 202/2002 on Equal Treatment and the work of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD)¹⁰.

✓ ***Atypical employment forms***

Self-employment in Romania faced many changes in the last years and from a form of employment which was supporting the family businesses without having huge taxes and financial burdens now it become a sistem who has a big bureaucracy and similar taxes like an employed person.

⁷ Idem 6

⁸ <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gm4temzygu/principii-si-definitii-ordonanta-137-2000?dp=gy3temrtgq2da>

⁹⁹ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/235923>

¹⁰ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/35778>

This type of employment – self-employment or Authorised Person was used in the past mainly by people who were doing traditional crafts, free-lance work or artistic work but majority of them started to close these companies as they are not too easy to be maintained due to taxation level and due to bureaucracy. In the first semester of 2024 were closed 10% more self-employment companies than same period in 2023¹¹ and at the same time were created 5% less companies in the first semester of 2024¹² comparing with 2023.

Many Roma are working as daily workers which it's a form of legal work in Romania but this type of employment it's many times misused and employers are not paying taxes and health security for the workers.

✓ ***Roma working abroad (temporarily or permanently)***

Many Roma workers from Romania migrate abroad, particularly to Western European countries like Spain, Germany, Italy, Austria, France and England for seasonal or permanent work. Their concerns are often shaped by the precarious nature of their jobs, legal status, discrimination, and access to social services.

Very often the Roma involved in seasonal work are facing exploitative labour conditions: they have very low wages, they work many hours per day, they work in very bad conditions they are receiving very poor living conditions.

This happens due to a very low control of this phenomenon, due to lack of education and poor knowledge about the local legislation and due to exploiting them by the companies or by different individuals who facilitate the access to the job abroad.

Many times, Roma return back from work without any money because they are not paid or they use the money they earn to pay the housing food and travel.

"There was a big group of Roma from our community who went to France to harvest the grapes and they were not paid by the farmer. ... Nobody did nothing even if we complain. This why we prefer to not go abroad for work." (AD – Roma women)

✓ ***Job creation and (social) entrepreneurship***

The creation of new jobs to target explicitly Roma people it's a initiative which is totally missing in Romania. In this moment many companies instead of investing to train and support Roma to become workers in their companies prefer to bring foreign workers from Asia which are trained.

Majority of the jobs available for Roma are the low paid ones which don't require a high education level or high trainings. There were some NGO's who tried to create jobs connected

¹¹ <https://termene.ro/articole/primul-trimestru-al-lui-2024-a-fost-mai-greu-pentru-antreprenori-decat-inceputul-anului-2023-a-crescut-numarul-insolventelor>

¹² <https://www.ceccarbusinessmagazine.ro/onrc-pesto-49200-de-persoane-fizice-si-juridice-au-fost-inmatriculate-in-primele-patru-luni-ale-acestui-an-a13369/>

with the community putting in value the crafts, traditions or skills of the Roma but they did not had to much success.

In 2024 were launched 2 funding measures for social economy part of the Program Inclusion and Social Dignity¹³ which aim to develop social economy in rural and urban areas but also there even if they target Roma as beneficiary the ones applying for the grants to create the social business need to have at least high school education completed and this lead to a very low percentage of Roma who has access to this program as they don't fulfil de educational criteria.

One of the rules of this program foresee that the social businesses which will be created need to employ people from disadvantage communities (Roma it's one of the target groups), this can lead to a certain number of Roma people employed but that depend of the ones who create the social enterprises.

Another program which will support the creation of social businesses will be the Program which support the implementation of the Urban Community Local Lead Development strategies where the LAG's included more types of employment measures one of them being also development of social businesses.

Even if we have the programs which support the social entrepreneurship there is no real support in the follow up and keeping those enterprises functional as the social entrepreneurship legislation in Romania don't foresee any support to be given to social enterprises.

✓ ***Employment in the National Roma Strategic Framework***

The National Roma Inclusion Strategy of Romania (SNIR) 2022-2027¹⁴ outlines several employment-related measures aimed at improving the labor market participation of Roma communities. However, despite the comprehensive framework, these measures face several challenges that limit their effectiveness.

The strategy highlights the need to reduce barriers to employment for Roma, such as low levels of education and skills. The inclusion of measures aimed at facilitating access to vocational training and employment opportunities shows an understanding of the root causes of labor market exclusion.

A specific attention is given to young Roma and Roma women, who are often doubly marginalized in the labor market. The framework acknowledges the gender dimension and seeks to promote access to decent jobs for these groups, which is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty.

The strategy aims to leverage European Union funds to support employment measures, which offers a significant opportunity to fund training programs, job placements, and initiatives targeting vulnerable Roma communities.

¹³ <https://mfe.gov.ro/pids/apeluri-de-proiecte-si-ghiduri-incluziune-si-demnitate-sociala/>

¹⁴ <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/SNIR-2022-2027.pdf>

While the strategy is ambitious, its implementation has been historically weak. The budgeting it's based on EU funds and there are no concrete implementation plans or milestones which to contribute to improve the situation of Roma. Many Roma continue to face significant challenges in accessing the labor market due to discrimination, lack of job opportunities, and underrepresentation in formal employment sectors

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Roma population in Romania faces significant barriers to employment, deeply rooted in historical marginalization, low educational attainment, and systemic discrimination. Despite national strategies like the SNIR 2022-2027, aimed at improving Roma employment, the implementation of these measures has been weak with limited progress observed on the ground

Roma workers are predominantly engaged in low-skilled, precarious jobs with little to no access to social security or formal contracts. Discrimination remains a major obstacle, affecting their hiring prospects, wages, and working conditions. Many Roma individuals work in the informal sector, particularly in agriculture and construction, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and lacking legal protections.

Women and young people from the Roma community are especially disadvantaged, with Roma women facing much lower employment rates than their male counterparts and non-Roma women. Furthermore, migration for work—a common practice among Roma workers—often results in further exploitation and poor working conditions abroad.

Efforts to improve employment opportunities for Roma through the National Employment Agency and civil society initiatives remain insufficient, particularly due to a lack of tailored, individualized approaches and heavy bureaucratic processes that disproportionately affect low-educated Roma. Access to vocational training is also limited, exacerbating the employment gap between Roma and non-Roma workers.

✓ *Recommendations*

1. Capacitate the employment services providers to be able to work and promote Roma inclusion and participation on labour market
2. Improve enforcement mechanisms to combat workplace discrimination, ensuring that Roma workers have equal access to jobs and career progression opportunities.
3. Create tailored training programs accessible to low-educated Roma individuals, enabling them to develop skills for higher-paying, stable jobs.
4. Ensure that the SNIR 2022-2027 employment measures are implemented effectively with clear milestones and sufficient resources.
5. Encourage private and public sector employers to adopt diversity policies that specifically target the inclusion of Roma workers.
6. Promote initiatives that foster social entrepreneurship among Roma communities, providing them with the tools and resources to create sustainable businesses.

The comprehensive employment challenges faced by the Roma in Romania call for more focused, sustained, and adequately resourced interventions to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion.