

## ROMA ACCESS TO DECENT AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT IN SPAIN

### Introduction

FAGiC – Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña (Federation of Roma Associations of Catalonia) is an umbrella organisation created in 1991 and brings together 96 local Roma associations from all over Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in Catalonia. FAGiC was created with the aim of defending and promoting the rights of the Roma within the Catalan society and to react and denounce any form of xenophobia or discrimination towards Roma population. Its main purpose is to improve actions aimed at the Roma, gather information about their aspirations and concerns, and establish a communication channel between the Roma and the rest of the Catalan society.

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The methodology we employed was mixed. We collected information from various sources, including research conducted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) at the national level, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Spain, as well as data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Team. Additionally, we utilized our own data; in the various employment projects we have carried out in recent years, we gathered information on our participants' access to employment and assessed whether it is decent and sustainable.

### ***Socio – economic situation of Roma in Spain***

The majority of the Roma population suffers from severe inequality and lack of protection in access to economic and social rights. Poverty and exclusion affect more than 80 per cent of the Roma population and have a major impact on minors.

Educational attainment is by far the most important determinant of employment and thus of socio-economic inequality among the Roma population. Only 17% of the Roma population over the age of 16 have completed obligatory or higher education, compared to almost 80% of the general population.

The situation of Roma women is very unequal, worse than that of Roma men and worse than that non-Roma women. The inequality gap affects all areas: employment, educational levels, family responsibilities, and even low expectations and few opportunities for advancement and promotion.

Labour market integration is strongly determined by social and socio-demographic factors, but also by discrimination and other cultural factors.

The situation of migrant Roma communities in Spain, particularly those from Eastern Europe, is even more precarious. Many migrant Roma face language barriers, legal challenges related to residency status, and extreme marginalization, further complicating their access to healthcare, housing, and employment. These challenges often lead to a cycle of poverty, exclusion, and increased vulnerability for both Spanish-born and migrant Roma populations.

Decent and sustainable employment is crucial for the inclusion of Roma individuals in Spain. Here's why:

1. Economic stability

Secure, well-paying jobs provide Roma families with financial stability, reducing poverty and economic marginalization. Sustainable employment enables Roma individuals to support themselves and their families, leading to improved living standards.

2. Social integration

Access to decent jobs helps Roma individuals integrate into mainstream society. Employment fosters social inclusion by providing opportunities for social interaction and reducing isolation from the broader community.

3. Skill development

Sustainable employment often includes opportunities for skill development and career advancement. This helps Roma individuals build competencies that can lead to better job prospects and long-term career growth.

4. Reduction of discrimination

Meaningful employment can help combat stereotypes and discrimination against Roma. By being represented in diverse and stable roles, Roma individuals can challenge negative perceptions and contribute positively to societal change.

5. Access to benefits

Decent employment typically comes with access to social benefits such as healthcare, pensions, and paid leave. These benefits are crucial for the overall well-being of Roma individuals and their families.

6. Community development

Sustainable employment contributes to the economic development of Roma communities. When Roma individuals are employed, they can invest in their communities, supporting local businesses and services.

In summary, securing decent and sustainable employment for Roma individuals is *essential for promoting economic stability, social integration, and overall inclusion in Spain.*

## Roma access to decent and sustainable employment in Spain

### *Where do the Roma work?*

The Roma community in Spain often faces significant barriers in the job market, leading to a high concentration in specific types of employment. Roma individuals are more likely to be engaged in informal and precarious work, such as street vending, seasonal labor, and low-wage, manual jobs. Many Roma work in roles that lack stability and social protections, which contributes to the high unemployment rates and lower overall employment figures within the community. The concentration in these types of employment reflects broader challenges of social exclusion and limited access to formal job opportunities.

### **Employment rate**

- As of recent studies, the employment rate among the Roma population in Spain is considerably lower than that of the general population.
- While Roma men are more likely to be employed than Roma women, their employment is still predominantly in low-skilled, insecure jobs.
- Roma men have a slightly higher employment rate compared to Roma women but still face high levels of unemployment.
- The unemployment rate for Roma men, while lower than for Roma women, remains significantly higher than the national average.

### **Types of work**

- Roma often work in sectors that require low skill levels, such as agriculture, construction, street vending, and cleaning services. These jobs are often informal and lack job security.

### **Unemployment rate**

- The unemployment rate among the Roma in Spain is significantly higher than the national average. Recent reports indicate that the unemployment rate among Roma can be as high as 36%, compared to the national average of around 14% (as of 2021).

### **NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)**

- The percentage of Roma youth (ages 15-24) who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is alarmingly high. Estimates suggest that over 60% of young Roma are NEETs, compared to the national average of around 14%.

### **Employment and unemployment by gender**

- Roma women face particularly high barriers to employment. Cultural factors, educational disparities, and discrimination contribute to their low participation in the labor market.
- The employment rate for Roma women is often lower than that of Roma men.
- The unemployment rate for Roma women is generally higher than for Roma men, reflecting greater difficulties in accessing job opportunities.

According to the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), a prominent organization working with the Roma community in Spain:

- The employment rate among Roma is around 30-40%.
- The unemployment rate among Roma can reach 36%, with variations depending on the region and economic conditions.
- The NEET rate for young Roma is over 60%.
- The employment rate for Roma women is about 18%, significantly lower than for Roma men.

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

The Roma community often struggles to access adequate support for employment due to a combination of systemic barriers. Limited educational opportunities and pervasive discrimination in the job market frequently result in Roma individuals being relegated to informal and precarious work.

Additionally, the lack of tailored job placement services and economic instability further compounds these challenges, making it difficult for Roma to invest in training or secure stable employment. Despite some initiatives aimed at improving their job prospects, the community continues to face significant obstacles that require more focused and effective support to overcome.

The approaches of employment offices towards the Roma community often range between supportive and punitive measures. This is unfortunately related sometimes with the stereotypes and the prejudices that “the Roma don’t want to work.

In some cases, these offices provide personalized assistance, tailored vocational training, and collaborate with community organizations to address specific barriers such as discrimination and lack of qualifications. However, in other instances, they may impose sanctions or pressure individuals to accept any available job, regardless of its stability or suitability.

This dual approach reflects a tendency where, despite some efforts to tailor support to the unique needs of the Roma community, significant challenges remain due to limited resources, institutional bias, and economic barriers that complicate investment in training and securing stable employment.

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

Access to income support for the Roma community while unemployed is often limited and challenging due to several barriers. Roma individuals may face difficulties with eligibility, as strict criteria for income support programs can exclude those engaged in informal or irregular work. Navigating bureaucratic processes can be daunting, especially for those unfamiliar with formal systems or facing language barriers. Social exclusion and stigma can also discourage Roma from seeking out or successfully accessing available benefits, and a lack of awareness about support services further complicates the situation.

In Spain, there are various types of employment-related aids and income support available, including:

- Unemployment benefits (Prestación por desempleo): Financial assistance for those who have lost their job and have contributed to social security
- Social Integration Income (Renta de Inserción Social): Aimed at individuals and families in extreme economic need, providing a basic level of financial support.
- Active Employment Policies (Políticas Activas de Empleo): Programs that offer job training, placement services, and subsidies for employers to hire unemployed individuals.
- Minimum Income Guarantee (Ingreso Mínimo Vital): A program providing financial support to low-income households to ensure a minimum standard of living.

Despite these available aids, many Roma face significant obstacles in accessing them, highlighting the need for more effective and inclusive support mechanisms.

### ***Antigypsyism in accessing employment***

Yes, the Roma community in Spain encounters significant discrimination in accessing employment, which manifests in several key areas. Public employment services sometimes exhibit bias against Roma individuals, resulting in less favorable treatment when it comes to job placements, career counseling, and training opportunities. This systemic bias can hinder their access to resources and support needed for securing stable employment.

Similarly, recruitment agencies often perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices, leading to Roma candidates being overlooked or not given a fair chance during the hiring process. This discrimination can prevent Roma individuals from even reaching the interview stage, impacting their overall employment prospects.

Employers also play a critical role in this issue. Discriminatory attitudes towards Roma applicants can result in fewer job offers or outright rejections based on unfounded biases or misconceptions about their background. This prejudice contributes to the significant employment gaps between Roma and the general population, reinforcing their socio-economic exclusion and limiting their opportunities for stable and meaningful work.

These combined factors create substantial barriers for Roma individuals in the job market, perpetuating cycles of unemployment and underemployment within the community.

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

In Spain, Roma workers are significantly overrepresented in low-paid jobs, often due to lower levels of formal education and training compared to their non-Roma counterparts. This educational disparity limits their access to higher-paying positions and professional opportunities.

Additionally, evidence shows that Roma individuals face an ethnic pay gap, where they are underpaid for equal work compared to non-Roma workers. This wage disparity is exacerbated by the systemic discrimination they experience in the job market, which affects their access to better employment opportunities and contributes to their economic marginalization.

The combination of lower educational attainment and discrimination perpetuates a cycle of low wages and limited career advancement for Roma workers.

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

In Spain, Roma workers are indeed overrepresented in precarious contracts that often come with poor employment rights and limited access to social security. They frequently work in informal or temporary positions where job security is minimal, and benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and paid leave are not guaranteed.

This precarious employment situation is compounded by the lack of formal contracts, which further restricts their access to legal protections and social safety nets.

Moreover, Roma workers are more likely to experience poor working conditions, including inadequate health and safety measures. They often find themselves in physically demanding and hazardous jobs with minimal oversight or regulation, which increases their risk of workplace accidents and health issues.

This vulnerability is a direct result of systemic discrimination and socio-economic exclusion, which push Roma individuals into the least secure and most exploitative forms of employment.

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

Roma workers in Spain generally face significant barriers when it comes to accessing on-the-job training and career progression compared to their peers. Due to lower levels of formal education and training, combined with systemic discrimination, Roma individuals often have limited opportunities for professional development. Employers may offer fewer training programs and career advancement opportunities to Roma workers, reflecting broader biases and stereotypes.

Furthermore, Roma workers are frequently employed in low-wage, low-skill jobs that offer limited prospects for career growth. This lack of access to training and advancement opportunities reinforces their socio-economic disadvantages and hinders their ability to improve their professional standing.

As a result, Roma workers are often trapped in cycles of low-paying, precarious employment with little chance for upward mobility.

While there may not be a deliberate conspiracy to keep the Roma in low-paying jobs, the structural and systemic factors contributing to their economic marginalization create a similar outcome. The persistence of these conditions, despite being known and despite some efforts to change them, suggests a lack of sufficient political will to achieve significant change.

Systemic racism implies that institutional practices and policies disproportionately disadvantage certain racial or ethnic groups. In this context, the continued marginalization of the Roma in the labor market can be seen as a consequence of systemic racism rather than a conscious effort by individuals or institutions.

There is a theory that marginalized groups are kept in low-paying jobs to meet the economic need for cheap labor, suggesting that systemic discrimination and economic policies may, intentionally or not, perpetuate this cycle to maintain an available low-cost workforce. Additionally, keeping marginalized groups in precarious employment can be seen as a form of social control, maintaining the status quo and limiting social mobility.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions, active enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and societal efforts to combat prejudice and promote inclusion.

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

Information on Roma representation within trade union structures is indeed limited, but available evidence suggests that Roma are generally underrepresented in these organizations. This lack of representation often results in Roma-specific concerns being overlooked or inadequately addressed.

Trade unions in Spain typically have low levels of Roma membership, which means that the unique challenges faced by the Roma community, such as discrimination in the workplace and barriers to accessing fair employment conditions, may not be prominently featured in union agendas.

The absence of Roma voices in trade union decision-making processes can lead to a lack of tailored advocacy and support for issues specifically affecting the Roma workforce.

This underrepresentation highlights the need for increased efforts to include Roma individuals in trade union activities and to ensure that their specific needs and concerns are effectively addressed within the broader labor movement.

#### ***Antigypsyism and discrimination in employment***

Yes, Roma individuals often face antigypsyism in the workplace, which manifests in various forms of discrimination from employers, coworkers, clients, and partners. This discrimination can include overt bias, exclusion from opportunities, and unfair treatment based on their ethnic background. Such prejudice can severely impact their job satisfaction, career advancement, and overall employment stability.

In addition to antigypsyism, Roma workers may encounter other forms of discrimination and unfair treatment, such as being assigned lower-status tasks, receiving lower pay for equivalent work, and being excluded from training and promotion opportunities. The awareness of available recourse and appeal mechanisms among Roma individuals is often limited, which can prevent them from addressing grievances and seeking redress for discriminatory practices.

Efforts to promote diversity in the workplace are generally insufficient. While there are some initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive work environments, they may not adequately address the specific needs of Roma workers.

Employment equality legislation in Spain provides a framework for combating discrimination, but its effectiveness can be hampered by lack of enforcement and the persistence of cultural biases.

In Spain, while there is no specific legislation targeting antigypsyism in employment, several laws address general discrimination:

Organic Law 3/2007 on Effective Equality: Promotes equal treatment and opportunities, applicable to ethnic discrimination.

Law 62/2003: Covers general equality in employment and against discrimination.

Law 49/2007: Focuses on equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including broader equality principles.

Penal Code: Article 510 criminalizes incitement to hate and violence based on race or ethnicity.

These laws provide a framework to combat discrimination, including antigypsyism, though specific measures for Roma are limited

Anti-bias training is indeed needed to help mitigate discrimination and create more equitable workplaces. Such training can raise awareness of unconscious biases, promote understanding and inclusion, and support the development of fairer practices.

However, for these measures to be truly effective, they must be implemented comprehensively and supported by strong legislative frameworks and proactive enforcement.

### ***Atypical employment forms***

In Spain, Roma individuals often engage in various forms of atypical employment:

- Many Roma are self-employed in small businesses or trades, which allows them flexibility but often lacks formal support and benefits. This includes activities like running small shops or providing services.

- Roma artisans frequently practice traditional crafts, such as handmade jewelry, textiles, and woodwork. These crafts are often passed down through generations and are integral to their cultural heritage.
- Roma workers may take on seasonal jobs, which are temporary and dependent on specific times of the year, such as agricultural labor during harvest periods.
- A significant number of Roma are involved in informal work, including street vending and casual labor. This type of work is typically unregulated and does not provide the same protections or benefits as formal employment.
- Some Roma continue to practice a nomadic lifestyle, engaging in various temporary or itinerant work opportunities as they move from place to place. This includes activities like setting up temporary markets or participating in seasonal fairs.

These atypical employment forms reflect both traditional practices and adaptations to current economic conditions but often come with challenges related to stability, legal recognition, and access to social benefits.

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

For Roma individuals from Spain working abroad, the main concerns include:

- Although Spain is in the EU, Roma workers may still face difficulties accessing social security benefits like healthcare and pensions when working abroad.
- Discrimination and exploitation: Roma workers might encounter discrimination and poor working conditions in host countries, particularly in informal or low-skilled jobs.
- Language differences and cultural unfamiliarity can hinder Roma workers' ability to navigate the labor market and access support services.
- Social exclusion and challenges with integrating into new communities can affect the well-being and stability of Roma migrants abroad.

**For Roma individuals from other EU** countries who come to Spain to work, many face similar challenges to those experienced by Spanish Roma abroad.

- They often encounter discrimination in the labor market, particularly in low-skilled or informal jobs, where exploitation and precarious working conditions are common.
- Additionally, accessing social services such as healthcare and housing can be difficult due to bureaucratic barriers or lack of information.

- Language barriers and cultural differences further complicate integration, and Roma workers from abroad may also face social exclusion, making it harder to form stable connections within local communities. These issues highlight the need for more inclusive policies and support systems in Spain for Roma workers from other EU countries.

These concerns highlight the need for ongoing support to ensure fair treatment and integration for Roma workers in other EU countries.

As a receiving country, The Roma who migrate here from Eastern Europe find themselves in a highly difficult situation. In Spain, we have the so-called Foreigner Identity Number (Numero de Identidad de Extranjero – NIE). Although they should have no problem in having a work contract, as they are from an EU country, this is not what occurs. The NIE is essential for being hired in Spain, facilitating the tax identification of foreigners and legal compliance. But in order to have a NIE, it is essential to come with a job offer already.

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

In Spain, job creation efforts for the Roma community face several challenges:

- There are some public and private initiatives aimed at increasing employment opportunities for Roma individuals. However, these efforts are often limited and may not sufficiently address the community's specific needs. Many Roma still face barriers to accessing these opportunities, such as discrimination and lack of targeted support.
- Community integration and diversity: While some job creation programs aim to be inclusive, there is often a lack of focus on ensuring that these jobs are rooted in Roma communities or actively foster diversity. This can result in limited long-term benefits and integration for Roma workers.
- Social economy and social enterprises: The social economy, including work integration social enterprises, plays a crucial role in providing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Roma individuals. These enterprises can offer tailored support, create inclusive workplaces, and help Roma employees develop skills and gain stable employment. They also offer a platform for Roma social entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses that benefit their communities.

Overall, while there are initiatives aimed at improving job creation and supporting Roma, more targeted and effective measures are needed to enhance access to meaningful employment and promote social entrepreneurship within the Roma community.

## ***National Roma Strategic Framework***

In the case of employment, although collecting ethnic data is morally complicated, it is important to have this information to better understand the realities.

### *1. Deficiencies in data collection*

One of the main shortcomings of the strategy is the lack of real and accurate data collection on most topics. The absence of up-to-date and detailed statistics hinders effective intervention and limits the ability to measure the real impact of the implemented policies. It is crucial to have data that accurately reflects the realities of the Roma people in order to design and execute actions that truly address their needs.

### *2. Need for an intersectional and interdepartmental approach*

We believe it is essential for the strategy to be approached from an intersectional and interdepartmental perspective. The different areas of intervention, such as education and employment, are interconnected and cannot be treated in isolation. For instance, improving access to education directly impacts future employment opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial that different government departments and areas work in a coordinated and collaborative manner to maximize results.

### *3. Diversification of efforts and participation of public administrations*

Another critical aspect is the need to avoid concentrating all labor improvement efforts in just a few social entities. While these organizations play a vital role as support bridges, public administrations must assume the primary responsibility for implementing employment policies. Direct involvement of governmental bodies ensures an equitable distribution of resources and a more efficient execution of proposed measures.

### *4. Focus on specific measures and general perspective*

Finally, the National Roma Strategy must balance the implementation of positive action measures with an inclusive general approach. It is essential to adopt specific actions that address the particular needs of the Roma community without leading to ghettoization. Integration should be a key goal, promoting the inclusion of Roma people in all areas of society and avoiding their segregation.

In summary, Spain's National Roma Strategy provides a valuable framework for improving the employment conditions of the Roma community, but it requires significant adjustments to be fully effective. Accurate data collection, an intersectional approach, diversification of efforts, and a balanced combination of specific and general measures are essential elements to ensure a positive and lasting impact on Roma employment. FAGiC will continue to monitor and collaborate on the implementation of this strategy to contribute to achieving these objectives.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

- ❖ Implement targeted training and skills development programs tailored to the needs of the Roma community.
- ❖ Provide support and resources for entrepreneurship, including mentorship, funding opportunities, and business development training.
- ❖ Develop and enforce stronger anti-discrimination policies to ensure fair treatment in the workplace.
- ❖ Increase access to legal support and advocacy services for Roma workers facing exploitation and unfair practices.
- ❖ Decrease the number of Roma youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)
- ❖ Create targeted outreach and support programs for Roma youth aged 16-30 to encourage educational and vocational engagement.
- ❖ Offer scholarships, internships, and apprenticeships specifically designed for Roma youth to facilitate their entry into the workforce.
- ❖ Enhance empowerment, participation, and activation of Roma women in the labor market
- ❖ Develop initiatives to support Roma women in accessing job opportunities, leadership roles, and professional development.
- ❖ Promote programs that address barriers to employment for Roma women, including childcare support and flexible working arrangements.
- ❖ Value and enhance the skills of Roma engaged in street vending
- ❖ Provide training and resources to improve the business practices and market reach of Roma street vendors.
- ❖ Facilitate the transition from informal street vending to formal business operations, offering support in areas such as legal registration, financial management, and market access.

### Additional ideas:

- Foster collaborations between local governments, businesses, and Roma organizations to create tailored employment and training programs.
- Launch public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and raise awareness about the contributions and potential of the Roma community.
- Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and measure the impact of employment initiatives on the Roma population.
- Involve Roma representatives in policy-making processes to ensure that employment policies and programs are responsive to their needs and realities.

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