



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



## **IntersectVoices in Europe - combating discrimination against Roma women**

**Comparative qualitative research report on multiple discrimination  
faced by Roma people in Finland, Italy and Romania in the field of  
education, health services, housing and employment**

*Authors:*

*Ph.D. Carmen Gheorghe*

*Ph.D. Cristina Mocanu*

Bucharest, March 2021



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Co-funded by the Rights,  
Equality and Citizenship (REC)  
Programme of the European Union



***This report has been elaborated within the project Intersect Voices in Europe – combating discrimination against Roma women, funded by the European Union's Fundamental Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The content of the report represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.***



## Acknowledgements:

*First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to Roma women accepting to be a part of our research and entrusting us with their experiences of daily life, struggle, shame, humiliation, inferiority, invisibility and discrimination.*

*We are aware of the difficulties and risks involved by data collection during pandemic times, by the enormous quantity of preparing the transcripts as well as their translation in English. We express our gratitude to the women carrying out the work on the behalf of the organizations involved in the project, as follows (starting with Roma partners involved):*

*from: E-Romnja Association for Promoting Roma Women's Rights, Romania*

Georgiana Lincan

Roxana Magdalena Oprea

*from: Romni Onlus, Italy*

Saska Jovanovic

Mirinda Ashley Karshan

*from: Helsinki Deaconess Institute Foundation, Finland*

Heini Puurunen

Ioana Tistea

Marjaana Toiviainen

*We are expressing our thanks to Anca Nica and Anca Enache for their logistic support, as well as to all local facilitators that eased our way into Roma communities in times of pandemic.*

*Last but not least we thank Asociația Centrală Pentru Legislație for their feedback and comments provided to the research through the entire consultation process.*



## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	7
<b>1. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	8
Understating intersectionality	8
Discrimination and access to welfare state benefits and services	11
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>	13
Methodology framework of the study	13
Limits of the study	17
<b>3. IDENTITIES AND GENDER ROLES</b>	21
Defining identities	21
Intersected categories	25
Colorism	29
Coping strategies	32
Antagonisms	37
Conclusions	40
<b>4. HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	43
Crowded neighborhoods, crowded houses	44
Infrastructure and utilities that serve community or neighborhood	47
Hiding the place of living in interactions with the gadjé world	49
Right to renting and buying houses	50
Leaving the house / the neighborhood	53
Accessing social housing	55
<i>Applying for social housing</i>	56
Living in social centers and night shelters	59
Patterns of access to adequate housing, health services and labor market	60
Conclusions	65
<b>5. ROMA GIRLS AND WOMEN IN EDUCATION</b>	68
Cultural norms with respect to education	69
Being a pupil – quality of education received	73
Discouragement in education	76



Access to social support in education	78
School as an unsafe space	80
School as a safe place	84
Racism and dropping out school	85
Going back to school	86
Being a mother or grandmother of a pupil	87
Patterns of discrimination in education	90
Conclusions	91
<b>6. ROMA WOMEN AND ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES</b>	<b>94</b>
Accessibility of healthcare services	96
Affordability of healthcare services	100
Discouragement in accessing healthcare services	101
Quality of services provided by the family physicians	103
Pap Test and breast controls	104
Discriminatory treatments within hospitals	105
Experiences during pregnancy and giving birth	109
Violence and treatment for violence	111
Patterns of access to healthcare system	112
Conclusions	114
<b>7. ROMA WOMEN, UNPAID WORKS AND LABOR MARKET</b>	<b>116</b>
Labor market expectations	116
Double burden for Roma women	117
House chores of Roma girls and women	119
Working from early ages	120
Discouragement in accessing labor market	121
Discrimination in accessing labor market	124
Getting fired	125
The occupations of Roma women	126
<i>Traditional occupation among Roma women</i>	126
<i>Working as self-employed</i>	127
<i>‘Gypsy jobs’ (Working informally)</i>	128



**Deaconess  
Foundation**



**Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law**



<i>Working as an activist</i>	129
Being paid less	130
Patterns of disadvantage and discrimination on the labor market	131
Conclusions	132
<b>8. REPORTING DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE</b>	135
Conclusions	139
<b>9. CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	141
References	144
Annex 1: Respondents` profile	148
Annex 2: Respondents` profile by country	152
Annex 3: Interview guidelines	153



## INTRODUCTION

In order to understand how discrimination based on multiple grounds affects Roma women we need to extend the context and to understand how they struggle in their cultural, socio-economic and national contexts. Therefore, the reader is required to treat the narratives of Roma women with respect and responsibility for such qualitative and sensitive data. Operating with intersectionality within our qualitative research posed many challenges from the beginning, due to the fact that in all three countries, women's identities are pre-defined in interactions with different environments and collective histories. Without looking interconnected to different spaces defined in this research as "worlds" and we don't depict the intersectional discrimination between these, we fail to understand intersectionality.

Another important issue is the universal human rights discourse used by many activists and in official documents. When arguing that "all women have low access to housing or health care" they practically make invisible the intersectional experiences and discrimination, ignoring systematic oppression that historical groups has and still have in Europe.

The experiences analyzed reveal intersectionality in interactions with ethnicity, gender, class, sexual identity and color. We also used intersectionality to dismantle essentialist views on Roma women's identities, to bring new nuances into the public discourse and agenda as queer Roma and Roma feminist scholar predecessors have done. Identities and categories are often in tension, but as Creenshaw points out, the biggest problem "is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them, and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies." (Creenshaw, 1991) That is precisely what happens to Roma women in all spheres with which they interact.



## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Understating intersectionality

After '90s the dominant narrative 'Roma issue' has been shaped by many Roma and non-Roma in researches, policies or discourses to build on shared experience of racism, social inequalities or to reinforce Roma ethnics as 'social issue' throughout Europe (Gheorghe, 2010, Rostas, 2019). The unitary perspective shaped this way created the agenda for social issues much needed for Roma minority which struggle with social exclusion, extreme poverty and racism in different countries, but ignored specific issues such as violence against women, forced practices associated with marriage, isolating voices of girls and women, Roma LGBT+, people with disabilities and other categories (Gheorghe, 2010, Femlova, 2020). In the last decade Roma women activists, feminist and queer Roma scholars have produced important knowledge on issues related to ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexuality and class, reclaiming the visibility of experiences of different groups as relevant for shaping new and better policies for Roma at EU and national level (Cioaba, 2006, Oprea, 2006, 2011, Gheorghe 2010, 2020, Kocke, 2009, 2019, Mark, 2010, Brooks, 2012, Bitu, 2012, Kurtic, 2013, Baker, 2015, Jovanovic, 2019).

Inherently, as Roma women activists, feminists and artists struggled within their work to articulate a more intersectional agenda in the Roma civil rights movement at EU level, tensions between identities arose, revealing the existentialist and ethnocentric perspectives attributed to Roma, rhetorical and political strategies against Roma LGBT+, universal fight against patriarchy, colliding with silencing voices and exclusion of Roma women from policy debate (Kurtic, 2013, Jovanovic & Daroczi, 2015, Kocze, 2015, Gheorghe, 2020). Moreover, Roma and non-Roma





queer scholars started to produce more analyses about the intersectionality of Roma LGBT+ providing evidences that demonstrate the conflicts between ethnic and sexual identities, belonging and displacement, homophobia and transphobia, taboo issue of women's sexuality (Kurtic, 2013, Baker, 2015, Fremlova, 2020). Even if the theme is insufficiently covered, **the necessity to make experience more visible and understood is crucial for an intersectional mechanism.**

Roma women are the "quintessential halfies" as defined by Ethel Brooks, placing themselves on the intersections, "moving between Romani and gadje worlds through processes of migration, education and culture" (Brooks, 2015).

Incorporating diversity of identities and experiences of Roma is without doubt much needed in research and design of policy due to historical exclusion, oppression and inequalities they faced. It does not sustain solely on an ethical standpoint, as Kockze (2011) points out "Dominant anti-discrimination policies are not sufficient to address various forms of intersecting inequalities in social policies. The development of intersectional approaches and methods might bring a new transformational politics in Europe, which will recognize and address Roma women's issues and social positions" (Kockze, 2011).

Intersectionality was originally coined by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in the US, as a systemic exclusion against women of color, their experiences of inequalities being invisible to both antiracist and feminists' movements. As their identities were split and treated separately, without interconnection, specific forms of discrimination, for example, on the labor market, ignored either their identity as women or as people of color.

Following the same path, in different countries in Europe, Roma feminist scholars and activists outlined intersectionality of ethnicity, gender and class, criticizing the "universal women's issues" and "Roma issues", contributing to a better understanding of interconnected identities and oppressive systems which affect the lives of Roma women and not only. But many of the challenges when unveiling such inequalities are associated with the lack of usable data on identity. Whether it is sexual identity, ethnicity, class, the sensitiveness of topic and how it interacts with different categories when dealing with inequalities are still a matter of activist and political



struggle, as European and national policies fail to address them properly (Jovanovic & Daroczi, 2015).

Roma women are not affected only by discrimination based on their ethnicity, or by sexism based on their gender identity and sexuality, or by classism based on their social position, level of education etc. Reducing Roma women's experiences in policies, solely to ethnicity, or sexism or social status, excludes de facto their intersected experiences, their historical backgrounds and fails to address them, through better laws and policies. Similarly, as institutions will continue to focus on single-axis identities and categories of discrimination, they will deny their experiences, perpetuate inequality, exclusion of different groups among Roma, such as LGBT+. In short, they need to take into consideration many aspects of their identities in order to unveil the current *status quo*. Unaddressed properly, identities become a personal or individual choice in a specific situation of discrimination.

There is extensive academic literature on intersectionality, but still **the empirical evidence on multiple identities of Roma women and how they experience it on a daily basis is without doubts still insufficient**. Throughout Europe, collecting data on Roma based on gender, sexual identity is still a sensitive topic due to its use in different contexts, which might reinforce prejudice or fuel racist, homophobic, anti-Roma actions. Nevertheless, the lack of desegregated data collected on gender, ethnicity and social status brings many challenges when addressing intersectionality. This is why the current research uses qualitative tools to bring more in-depth information about sexual identities, social status, ethnicity, skin color and strategies in different contexts and countries, which will be examined in the following pages.

When tackling intersectionality in relation to Roma women, many perspectives are needed for analyses, starting with identity categories, power relations within the group and in relation to different gadge and systems that creates more social and systemic injustices. Color, sexual identities, ethnicity, social status (with education and employment status), disability, religion but also cultural patterns, social norms, institutional practices are interconnected and are determinants for power relations and social justice.



The objective of this chapter is to understand how identities are shaped, in interaction with family and “gadje world”, to construct Roma women experiences and intersectional discrimination. The chapter on identities and gender roles explores the ethnic, gender, color, sexual identity and class as proxies for life changing experiences. Should the social status, color or gender matter when we access health care services? When we choose our job or get a better wage? While the paper aims to respond as much as possible to these questions, the chapter addressing identities and gender roles will make introductory remarks on how identities are shaped, addressed and interact. Inquiries about identities are relevant in order to understand what kind of strategies Roma women find for a better life and how these can be supported through institutional means.

A short note on the concept of “gadje world” used in this research, which refers in one single syntagm to non-Roma people, institutions and structures. It has the capacity to synthesize these concepts highlighting the hierarchies and power relations affecting Roma women. The term “gadje” comes from Romani language and it refers to the otherness, the non-Roma people or all who do not belong to Roma ethnics, quoted by Roma women participants to the research.

### [Discrimination and access to welfare state benefits and services](#)

The selected countries for comparative analysis practically belong to a certain typology of welfare state, being characterized by different approaches and mechanisms in addressing the safety net and the mix of policies needed to address the most vulnerable citizens (among which Roma women are more likely to be present). Interactions between Roma women and gadje institutions - housing, education, healthcare, labor market and justice system are influenced by the general model of welfare state under which each of these institutions are designed and financed.

Finland belongs to the typology of socio-democratic welfare state, Italy to the south-Mediterranean typology, while Romania belongs to the post-communist welfare regime. Considering the type of the welfare state involved, we contextualize the access that Roma women have to different social services and labor markets, taking into account how different societies



respond to inequalities and the need for redistribution. We didn't aim to dedicate this study to comparative research on the welfare state, choosing only to emphasize when needed the relevance of different findings. All three countries covered in the studies are types of the European social model, Romania, as an emerging country, failing to address redistribution and to provide a safety net for most of its vulnerable citizens.

Even if there are differences among these models of welfare states, each of them aims to address the needs of its citizens and residents. To what extent they succeed to address inequalities, realize redistribution of resources and provide equal opportunities depends mostly on how the "rights" and "social justice" are understood and defined. Addressing "rights" means addressing "needs" (Taylor-Gooby, 2012) large debates being carried on how responsibility in meeting individual needs has to be splitted in between individuals, communities and the state.

The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is mainly the most relevant measure for the capacity of a (welfare) state to address the basic needs of its citizens and to provide social justice. Poverty, social class and discrimination are strongly linked with the power relations existing in a specific society (Braunholtz-Speight, 2008). Unequal power relations are produced and reproduced by economic processes, but also by how social services of housing, education and healthcare systems are functioning. According to Eurostat data for 2019<sup>1</sup> (ILC\_PEPS01) Romania (31,2%) scores among the countries with shares of people vulnerable to poverty above the EU average (20,9%), while Italy is slightly above the EU average with a share of 25,6%. Finland is among the most successful countries in fighting poverty, only 15,6% of its citizens being at risk.

---

1



## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Methodology framework of the study

The objective of the study is to put light on the experiences of multiple / intersectional discrimination of Roma women in three European countries: Finland, Italy and Romania. As stated by project objective, we aimed to identify and compare different patterns of experiences among different countries in relation to housing, education, health and employment, but also taking into account the diversity of Roma women.

The study is based mainly on a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews being used in order to reach the research objectives. Each partner organization was responsible for data collection in its own country, as well as for drafting the transcripts of the interviews. Transcripts were anonymized and translated into English and analyzed by the E-Romnja Association for Promoting Roma Women's Rights as well as the prepared research report.

Defining a methodological framework allowing us to identify the situations of multiple discrimination in all the areas addressed by the report was one of the most challenging tasks for the authors of this report. At the beginning, it seemed almost impossible to draw a methodology that can capture different systems of oppressions affecting the Roma women's lives, as well as how Roma women navigate through all their identities and try to manage their lives under different and sometimes opposite expectations from family, community and gadje people. The conceptual framework of *everyday discrimination* and *lifetime discrimination* (Rodriguez, 2008, Essed, 191, 1990), as well as the operationalization proposed by Rodriguez (2008) inspired us to define our qualitative approach. Everyday discrimination (being called names, insults, threats, being treated with less respect on streets, restaurants, public spaces, being considered less capable or good, etc.) usually passes as “normal” or less important (Rodriguez, 2008), but it depicts a long series of



repetitive micro-aggressions, that add one to each other and influence decisions that could change the life course (dropping out school, avoiding to access healthcare, building houses on flood prone lands, etc.). Lifetime discrimination refers to major events that occur a few times during the life course (Rodriguez, 2008), but it can affect major decisions that Roma women take in different contexts or interactions with education, health, housing market or labor market. As examples of lifetime discrimination, it can be mentioned discouraging in following higher education, denying access to jobs, preventing renting or buying homes, receiving inferior medical care, etc.

Data were collected in the three above mentioned countries. The data from Italy and Romania consists of 20 interviews each, while 22 Roma women were interviewed in Finland. Overall, a total of 62 interviews and more than 1000 pages of narratives have been included in the analysis. The qualitative methodology developed, the process of data collection and analysis were carried out with the purposes of giving space for Roma women to speak about their daily lives and experiences of discrimination. In order to methodologically put light on multiple discrimination, which is so difficult to measure and emphasize, words like shame, inferiority, feeling less than others etc. were used. Positive experiences in relation to housing, education, health and employment were also collected, but they fade in comparison to the discriminatory ones.

The project team developed a framework for data collection keeping in mind the need to cover Roma women as diverse as possible. By interviewing diverse Roma women coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and with different choices and life courses, living in different (welfare) states, we aimed on the one hand to underpin similarities between different experiences, but on the other hand to put the light on micro-inequities and micro-differences of treatment in the daily lives of Roma women (Hinton-Smith & all, 2017).

We took into account age, area of residence, living in segregated spaces (such as compact communities, traditional communities, ghettos, improvised / illegal settlements, camps), sexual orientation, cultural identity (speaking Romani, wearing traditional clothes, respecting different cultural traditions), education level and history of migration, being aware of the difficulties of finding common patterns within such a diverse group.



Analysis was carried out using mainly techniques specific to qualitative methodologies, primarily a thematic analysis approach being undertaken. The information collected was explored in order to identify common ideas and patterns. In order to evidence patterns in data, the experiences of Roma were categorized by themes and sub-themes, coded and then introduced in an SPSS data set. Roma women socio-demographics and experiences in different areas (housing, education, health and labor market) were put in relation through quantitative analyses, multiple correspondence analysis being undertaken. The quantitative approach was used also with the purpose of testing and re-enforcing the assumptions used for providing explanations during the qualitative analyses.

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) is a multivariate method usually used for exploratory purposes (Doey & Kurta, 2011), allowing us to evidence patterns of association between different categorical data (Philips, 1995). It is easy to understand and interpret as practically consisting in evidencing associations by the distance between different points on the biplot (StatSoft, Inc., 2010). MCA was run using SPSS 23 software.

The women targeted during data collection have different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, sexual identities, affiliation to a kin Roma subgroup or are from different countries. (please see Annexes 1 & 2 for participants involved).

In our introductory part of the research, we started the conversation with Roma women interviewed with the theme of identity and family. We wanted to understand the sense of belonging to Roma origin, living in their extended family, language spoken in the family, color, Roma community/neighborhood, how they were treated as girls, if there are siblings, how they perceived their identities (gender, ethnicity or other identities) how they talked about them and in which spaces. We aimed to put light on how multiple identities of Roma women shape their experiences of discrimination and interactions with the Roma and non-Roma community, as well as with public institutions (also frequently perceived as non-Roma). An in-depth understanding on how multiple identities shape experiences in interaction with different areas (housing, communities, education, health, labor market) is very necessary. It is needed to develop adequate responses to structural inequalities and discriminations that could occur in each addressed area, but also to law





practitioners in order to depict useful mechanisms to improve the Roma women's access to justice. In the absence of such an understanding, Roma women's experiences of intersectionality will be excluded in the law practice and policy design.

We used a theoretical sampling procedure, with the aim of interviewing a diversity of Roma women living in different contexts. Each country team had specific instructions to cover a minimum number of interviews for each strata of the sample, in order to obtain a balanced sample by different dimensions. In order to collect relevant information in relation to most recent experiences of Roma women in all four proposed areas of analysis (housing, education, health and labor market), we restricted the age interval to 25-55 years old for the majority of the sample. The final sample (see Annexes 1 & 2) covered experiences of Roma women with ages varying in between 19 and 66 years.

Respecting the selection procedures proved to be more challenging for the Finnish case, where we encountered a more homogenous sample, in terms of the level of education (mostly with no or low education), area of residence (mostly from urban areas – Helsinki) and migration history (mostly with migration background from the Eastern European countries - mostly Romanians, but also Bulgarians), complicating the process of analyzing and integrating the collected data. As expected, due to the homogeneity of the sampling procedures, the experiences collected by the Finnish team were also homogenous, and allowed us only to a minimum extent to understand how the Finnish welfare state develops its inclusive approach in all the four areas addressed by the study.

In order to ensure a feminist approach to our research we wanted to distance ourselves from the classical relation between the researcher and ‘subject of investigation’. As we are aware of the power relation created between the researcher and the ‘subject of research’, our methodology tool for collecting data relied on establishing a few factors, such as: a more equal relation, acknowledging the privileges of those who conducted the interviews, both Roma and non-Roma, placing women and their experiences in the forefront of the research and valuing the empirical knowledge that they produce (Longino, 2010, Harding, 1993, Alcoff, 1989). We stand by the belief that knowledge for this research is created in relation with the women interviewed (Rioped, 2005).





Therefore, the researchers who conducted the interviews in each country used a communicative methodology in which the dialogue shifted from “investigating a social subject” to a dialogue between both persons involved in the data collection. As Sanches, Yuste, De Botton and Kostic (2019) underlined, this kind of methodology is recommended when addressing issues of disadvantaged groups which have been historically oppressed and excluded from knowledge production, such as the Roma, because it creates a space where women can reflect and talk, but it also ensures that their voice is not silenced. Also, as recommended, interviewing was preceded by more informal, explorative discussions, the rationale being to build confidence in the relationships with the less vocal and more powerless women. When possible, interviews were conducted in Romani (6) or the language of the countries where migrants originate: Romanian (14) and Bulgarian (5).

Data were collected starting with August 2020 until December 2020 and overlapped with the second wave of the pandemic, so many communities already known by partner organizations were targeted.

Although it would have been desirable to have Roma women as fieldworkers in all countries, this was only possible in Romania. Thus, interactions between Roma women and interviewers had a different pattern from one country to another, with Roma women being more open to discuss taboo subjects such as skin color and health issues when the fieldworker was also a Roma woman.

### Limits of the study

The limitations of our study, some of them being already mentioned, have several sources or causes: (1) the methodological design as well as the choices we made in the operationalization of multiple discrimination; (2) the data collection process and (3) choices made during the process of data analyses.

#### *(1) Limits assumed in the process of designing the methodological approach*



One of the most important limits of methodological design is related to *the relative low numbers of interviews* carried out in the three countries (cca. 20 in each). The complexity of study objectives as defined in the project proposal – investigating experiences of multiple discrimination in four areas (housing, education, health and labor market) – would have required a larger number of interviews, but the pandemic waves urged us to find a balance in between study objectives and the need to collect reliable data during the challenges of the times that we are all experiencing.

Methodological choices done in the design phase of the study are mostly related to the *dimensions taken into account* in selecting respondents and sub-themes addressed in the study. We have addressed a larger number of dimensions: age, area of residence, having experiences of living in segregated communities, sexual identity, level of education, employment status, migration history, motherhood, speaking Romani, skin color or having a disability or a chronic illness.

Even if the number of dimensions taking into account when sampling criteria and interview guidelines were prepared is impressive, *we had to exclude other dimensions*, such as religious beliefs and denomination or to deepen the role of traditional clothes in the lived experiences of discrimination. Also, due to the high number of sensitive dimensions included in the analysis (ethnicity, disability, sexual identity, skin color etc.) we decided not to prompt extensive questions on the role of the “typical Roma names and surnames” in the methodology design.

#### *(2) Limits related to how the fieldwork was carried out*

One of the most important limits affecting the process of data collection was the *COVID pandemic*. We had to limit as much as possible interactions with respondents, so only a low number of interviews were carried out in more than one single discussion. Also, pandemic urged organizations to carry out interviews mostly within the communities they are already working or with beneficiaries of former or different programs / projects. Thus, the final dataset provided by the Finnish team was too homogenous and a *very low number of interviews were carried out with Finnish Roma women* (only 3, all of them highly educated). Data collected on the interactions between citizenship and circular migration practices are valuable, but in some cases exceeded the purposes of our research.



Even if we were aware that all dimensions required by the sampling criteria will not be met, we urged for a significant minimum number of Roma LGBT+ to be reached. Unfortunately, we did not succeed to collect up to our needs, but we introduced as much as possible in the report. *Further studies have to be developed in order to give space to the voices and experiences of Roma belonging to LGBT+ community.*

We recommended, if possible, *data to be collected by Roma women as fieldworkers*<sup>2</sup>. This was done only in Romania, so the dynamics in between the interviewer and respondents affected the data collected for some sub-sections: health issues and domestic violence. The patterns of discrimination in the health system appears mainly in Romania, where the fieldworker was a Roma woman. As we are aware of this, we want to emphasize as a limit that the dynamics created in a Roma-gadje discussion on a topic so sensitive as health issues (including motherhood and pregnancies) did not facilitate the adequate shedding of light on other more subtle and covert patterns of discrimination happening in Italy and Finland (where health services have a higher quality). So, we strongly recommend further studies addressing health issues to employ Roma women as fieldworkers in order to avoid negative dynamics in the data collection process.

Last, but not least, there are other factors influencing data collection in each country and usually affecting comparative qualitative data. *Each fieldworker adapted the interview guidelines to the specific case of each interviewed Roma women, their own biases and interests affecting in some cases the quality and the depth of data collected.*

### *(3) Limits and choices related to data analysis*

Even if a larger number of interviews would have been welcomed, this being in fact the dream of any researcher, we have succeeded to evidence multiple patterns of experiences among the three different countries and areas addressed. We know that *there are still many situations and patterns that could not be highlighted due to the relative low numbers of interviews collected in each country.*

---

<sup>2</sup> All fieldworkers were women.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



As there were so many dimensions considered for depicting the diversity of Roma women, *we focused the presentations of our results on those generating the most frequent and relevant results.* But further analyses specifically addressing some of the dimensions should not be excluded.

Also, as the purpose of our survey was to focus on experiences of multiple discrimination and data collected were so rich, *we decided to focus on personal experiences and reflections that Roma women have on their own identities.* So, narratives on their knowledge of different situations of discrimination happened to other family members or friends were presented only when they were similar to those lived by respondents.

*And as the data collected were so rich and thoughtful, we decided to give as much as possible space for Roma women narratives, understanding and reflections. We questioned our position as researchers and strongly believe that Roma women should have more space and voice within any research.*



### 3. IDENTITIES AND GENDER ROLES

Thus, according to aims, the methodology included in this section four main topics of discussions, from family, identities performed, spaces to talk about identities and Roma LGBT+. The complexity of identity dominated all the conversations, denoting tensions between essentialist views on their identities within the family and expectations, identity perceived and exclusion in interaction with the “gadje world” and own experience of identities as Roma women. In other words, there is an unacknowledged identity conflict between what they are taught as Roma girls in the family and community, perceived identity when interacting with the “gadje world” and their own reflection about identities. As a consequence, the essentialist view on “Roma” excludes their experiences and is improperly represented in research and policies, failing to address intersectionality. Adapting to standards as required from them by others, self-defining with experiences derived from early ages create multiple tensions and conflicts. This is more evidenced in the situation of Roma lesbians and transgender as women testify further. In the following pages, we will explore Roma women’s identities based on the lived experience and interactions.

#### Defining identities

Identity is a social construct and is subject to numerous definitions and understandings in different disciplines (Fearon, 1999, Jenkins, 1996). The process of defining and redefining identities is a continuous and interactive sum of experiences, positive and negative, which cannot be seen individually, but collectively and in power relation with the dominants, whether they are men, gadje or representatives of institutions (as teachers, physicians, police etc.) (Longino, 1990, Creenshaw, 1999, Gheorghe, 2016, Rostas, 2019). That is why, identities are not fixed, they



changed with age, social and political context, family history of migration, gender and sexual identity, ethnicity, color, language etc. Within this context, self-identification appears as an internalized process influenced by socio-economic status, perceived cultural patterns, gender norms, representations in the media, public discourse about the Roma, experiences of racism, rejection from non-Roma and homophobia.

Based on our methodology, we start from the premise that identity and experiences are influenced by the interactions with family, neighborhood/community and the ‘‘gadje world’’. Navigating through these intersections, in this chapter we explore how Roma women define themselves and navigate through categories such as: Roma belonging, color, sexual identity, language, religion, location etc. A total of 62 Roma women participated in our research, from Italy, Finland and Romania (*for the methodological process and profile of respondents please see Annexes 1 & 2*). In order to understand the disadvantages of intersected categories of identities, such as ethnicity, sexual identity and class, we learned to listen to what they have to say. Therefore, this introductory chapter represents their space to share their own experiences.

Starting with identities, Roma women participants call upon their family origin, ethnic membership, social status and gender altogether.

*‘‘My father made pots; he was a Kalderash Roma. My mother was a housewife. At home we have always spoken Romani, as well as Bosnian. I got married at 16 and then I came to Italy. I had 7 children and, of course, I always dressed as gypsies do, with a long skirt, otherwise it's a shame.’’ (Interview 1, Italy)*

*‘‘I come from the community of ursari in M. [name of the town] (..) I grew up with my grandmother and my two uncles. In the M. community, where the Romani language is spoken, there is also a certain wear for older women and girls who get married. Most wear skirts, and older women wear aprons and headscarves.’’ (Interview 20, Romania)*

*‘‘I was raised in a Roma family; my parents were very open to me about our cultural background since I was small. My grandparents spoke Roma language to each other sometimes, and my mother also taught me some of it. I am still able to understand some sentences here and there. In my family, Roma culture, clothing, community was something very natural and ‘‘normal’’, but I*



*realized my difference and my family's difference while living in city owned apartment buildings (cheap rental area) and playing with other small children." (Interview 17, Finland)*

*"My mother is Bosnian Muslim; my father is Serbian Orthodox. We lived in the Balkans until the war. When the war broke out, we faced dangerous situations and therefore we had to escape. In the Balkans, we used to live in a house. My mother was a seamstress and a housewife, my father was a farmer. We ran away, we lost everything, we went through a thousand difficulties. We first arrived in Germany, where we got the refugee status, except for my father, because he was Serbian." (Interview 9, Italy)*

The family environment is a place where all interconnected categories including sexual identity are revealed, but experiencing them is different. In other words, even if identities are intersectional, experiencing them is quite different and is also determined by the interactions with the "others". For example, ethnic and gender identity is perceived either as a heritage of the family or as a given from God, while social status and migration are seen as consequences of country politics, community or neighborhood they live in, racism, sexism, heteronormativity or traditions. According to their national context, participants made many references to persecutions suffered by members of their families in the Holocaust/Samudaripen, due to former Yugoslavia politics, the consequences of war, communism in Romania, migration policies, which led to segregated camps, informal settlements or Roma neighborhoods. These contexts become relevant when women migrate to other countries, such as Italy and Finland, or in the situations of mobility to/from village/Roma community to an urban place, as in Romania. For example, Roma women participants from Italy share stories of trauma's given by their status as refugees after the war in former Yugoslavia, still invisible in the destination country.

*"I am an Italian woman of German origins. My family came to Italy at the end of the 19th century, to escape the German discrimination against "gypsies". In Germany, already at the end of the 19th century, the "gypsies" were registered, regardless of individual behavior. In this ethnic filing there were also my great-grandfather and my grandfather. Then, in Italy, my family experienced the tragedy of fascism, with the Italian concentration camps, such as that of Agnone (in the Molise region, ed.). My mother was a revolutionary, she belonged to a very large family:*





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*there were 14 brothers and sisters. Her family was a family of musicians and circus performers; they were not dangerous at all, as the Nazis believed.” (Interview 11, Italy)*

*“My father and my mother are Roma, traditional Roma who raised us by talking to us about our culture. At home, we always spoke Romani but we did not live with our grandparents and aunts/uncles, even if they lived close to our house. I have a twin sister and an older brother. My mother died when I was 11. With us, females, our parents were a bit more severe, it is normal, but very little. I can say that there have been no major differences in my home regarding our education.” (Interview 3, Italy)*

*“I was born in a Roma family of ursari in Giurgiu County. I relocated to a village with a lot of mud, a poor community of Roma ursari. We spoke Romani mixed with Romanian, but I’ve learned Romani there.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

*“The family in which I was born in Romania [pause-silence]. I grew up both well and bad. I begged in Romania, until I was 14, I begged in Romania. We had um we had, we were poor, I was an only child. I lived with my mother and father in a shed [magazie]. So, we did not have a house. We did not have a yard. The mayor gave us a place [sighs] and um we built a shack [baracă], a shed so to speak, to tell you more clearly. And we lived in that shack until I was 18.” (Interview 7, Finland)*

*“We lived in Bulgaria, in T. in a neighborhood, where only us, Roma people and Turkish people, lived. My mother and father raised me, through hardship, how to tell you, they however raised four children. (...) There was no difference, keeping in mind that before, when I was small, there was Todor Zhivkov’s regime: then there was work and money, every child’s needs were satisfied, we did not lack anything. My mother worked and they paid her well...” (Interview 21, Finland)*

Family stories are shared in closed spaces, the experiences of trauma from racism are passed on verbally from generation to generation. The remembrance of these actions is still vivid for women who talk about cases of racism happening in their families and is passed on to their children. This situation is rather understood by them as a form of preparing themselves and their children for the interaction with the gajde world where most of the women had encounter racism, discrimination, according to their responses. Lowering expectations in interaction with non roma





is also a coping strategy which protects women from being affected. Passing on the trauma of racist acts for being roma, migrants and with social status becomes a coping strategy. Remembrance of racism in societies falls again on the responsibility of roma, without acknowledgement from society, revealing structural inequalities and power relations between Roma and non Roma when defining narratives.

When Roma women were asked when they became aware of their ethnic identity, the responses varied a lot. At least half of the participants acquired their ethnic identity through family lines or blood, or in other words, you are who you are because the family tells you who you are. Identity is a lived experience in the family and with relatives. Most of them admit that within the family they do not talk so much about identities but take it as it is.

*“My family has never told me anything about the fact that I am a gypsy. I’m just a gypsy. I am a gypsy and I will be a gypsy all my life.” (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“I never discovered it; I always knew it. I never had any problems when I was a child because all the friends I had, both Roma and non-Roma, were normal with me.” (Interview 7, Italy)*

*“They said, “Look, you are our little gypsy”. And I said, okay, but why am I a little gypsy? “Because we are gypsies.” (Interview 10, Romania)*

*“God made us Gypsies; we are Gypsies. Why would I say I am Romanian? If God made Romanians and Gypsies and all kinds. We thank God.” (Interview 5, Finland)*

### Intersected categories

Lack of information in school curricula about Roma history and culture predominates in all three countries investigated for this report, as well as the dominant negative representation perpetuated about Roma in the media. These factors have direct consequences for the women interviewed in terms of self-esteem, coping strategies in the face of racist attitudes and access to education, social housing, social services, fair treatment on the labor market (Mocanu & Zamfir



2006, Gheorghe, 2010, 2014, Costache 2019). Therefore, in most of the cases, it falls under the responsibility of the Roma families to talk about their own history, culture and ethnic identity.

Even if in the families' identities are not always talked about and debated, there are clear emphasis on different categories of identity such as Roma language as an origin based which defines an ethnic group, culture (with symbols, celebrations, behaviorism), different traditions (such as clothes, music), social status, gender norms, membership kin, migrant identity and color. Family is therefore a terrain where more categories and attributes intersect and are taught.

Among others, one example is language, where 49 Roma women out of the 62 interviewed in the three countries speak Romanes mostly within the family and Roma collectives.

*“We speak Romani of course, I mean how to tell you, this is our legacy, inheritance, this is our tradition to speak Romani. Sokeres or cai sans [she says in Romani]. This is our normal Romani tradition. Because there are many Romani nations.” (Interview 3, Finland)*

*“My mother was very practical when it came to Roma culture: she taught me about respect, relationship with the elders in the family. She taught me how to behave and “carry myself”. It was not something very ideological or “strange”, it was very normal and pragmatic. So, I would say it was not so much about “speaking” as it was about just being, behaving, manners etc.” (Interview 18, Finland,)*

*“My father and my mother are Roma, traditional Roma, who raised us by talking to us about our culture (...) since I was very small, they talked to me about our traditions, they told me that I had to be proud of my identity.” (Interview 3, Italy)*

*“We have always lived as Roma at home. Despite integration, although we avoid saying outside, that we are Roma, we do not forget our culture, our festivities. My parents have never made us forget our traditions. They always told me and my siblings that it is important not to forget our traditions, not to forget where we came from and who we are. “(Interview 8, Italy)*

Women's clothes play an important role in their lives, being a catalyzer for positive or negative experiences in public places, in correlation with their skin color. Kerchiefs, long skirts, costumes are a part of the Roma culture, which all participants in the research acknowledged.



According to our respondents, some embrace them as a form of respect to their Roma belonging and some reject it due to gender norms and restrictiveness imposed to Roma women, reprisal as they would be identified Roma or as a coping strategy when stating “we dress like gadje women’. Particularly for Roma transgenders, it represents the early signs of reaching out to more visibility within the family, which is often repressed by violent acts.

*“If I just wear a skirt, people very few times notice that I am Roma, because I have light skin, and this saves me, also having blue eyes. But if I put flowers on my head, for example, then I am definitely perceived as a Roma”. It happens to me that, on the streets, people don't come near me, they go away, they don't let me sit on the bus, or they open the windows “because I stink”, even though I've just taken a shower. (...) Often, as a homosexual, when I am with my wife, I have been insulted in the streets: “Shitty lesbians!”. And then, when I am alone, I have often been insulted because of my ethnic identity: "Shitty gypsy".” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“I do wear skirts and Roma style jewelers, but the traditional dress felt too big of a burden, it felt a little unpractical and later on, especially when I decided to study to be a nurse, it kind of felt impossible. My sisters wear the traditional dress, and sometimes I feel a little bit like...I have let my parents down (my mother wears the dress), but at the same time, I know they are proud of me and respect my decisions.” (Interview 3, Finland)*

*“In my house we speak Romani and we have a lot of contacts with our origins. Every year we go to Macedonia and Croatia and my brother got married with the Roma rite. We dress like the Gadgé, we don't wear long skirts at home, even my mom doesn't. The neighborhood we live in, here in Caserta, is a mixed neighborhood.” (Interview 19, Italy)*

*“I am seen as Latin American, Spanish, Turkish etc. This has in a way “saved” me, since I do not get all the racism that many other Roma experience. I also do not wear the traditional Roma clothing, so I pass easier as a non-Roma. In Finland, it is easier to be a foreigner than a Roma, it seems to me.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

*“We wear an apron and a cloche skirt. I have never seen my mother and aunts, who are 45 years old, wearing jeans. They never wore pants. The tradition is to wear the apron because we are florari (flower sellers), and this is what represents us, this is what makes us different. The*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*woman must know to do most of the things, while the man doesn't have to. In general, the woman must work more than the man.” (Interview 4, Romania)*

The challenges to navigate through identities as Roma ethnics are doubled in interaction with the “gadje world”. Hence, Roma women possess identities characterized by hybridity, in the everyday life becoming more difficult to navigate when they are treated in the uniaxial dimension (Fremlova, 2020). For the women interviewed for this research, the most common way to become aware of the differences they possess was during their first interactions with the “gadje world”.

The numerous experiences recounted for this research, although there is not enough space to include them all within this chapter, recall education as the first “space” for interaction and differentiation. Going to school also represents the first stepping-out of the family/community, therefore the memory of the first interaction is vivid, as within the education system they face racism, discrimination and bullying. In this case, the teachers became the symbol of the “gadje world”, which discriminate, discourage or are accomplices to different situations experienced by Roma girls.

*“I discovered that I was a "gypsy", in a negative sense, on the first day of school, in first grade. I've always known about my origins, my culture, but not in a negative way. In the country where I lived, everyone knew that my family was a circus family. That day I arrived at school, there were children playing volleyball, I went up to play with them but they sent me away: "You have to go away because you are a gypsy".” (Interview 11, Italy)*

*“I became aware of the fact I am a Roma when I left my community to go to high-school. I swear to you! I realized it when my headmistress came to me and said that I have a certain accent and I have to get rid of that accent.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

*“I was bullied at school, all day, every day for 5 years, so I was made aware of my difference, other children taught me that. I did not get any kind of support in that situation; the kids were allowed to continue teasing and bullying me. I do identify as Roma when asked, but it is not something I actively think about or think of as my “identity”. I am many other things as well.” (Interview 1, Finland)*



*“When I was in school, and I saw that there were only blond hairs, white children, most of them with blue or green eyes, and in all my class, it was one more girl and me - we were the only Roma, that was all. The only Roma people were that girl and me. And I said to myself that something is not okay here, what is going on?” (Interview 10, Romania,)*

*“I went to school until second grade – we had a big classroom, where we were three or four Roma children, and the Bulgarians pulled away from us saying ‘Gypsy girl, Gypsy girl’. But we did not mind, as we were human beings, too, and we just told them ‘You, what kind of [person]are you?.’”(Interview 21, Finland)*

*“I have always known this [being Roma, ed.], but I felt a great difficulty when I started school, due to the language [she did not speak Romanian but only Romani, ed.] and due to the treatment of my teachers and my classmates.” (Interview 16. Italy)*

## Colorism

Within the spectrum of identity, skin color is an attribute which constantly appeared during the conversations with Roma women (especially in the interviews from Romania, where the interviewer was also a Roma woman). When specifically asked how they define themselves in terms of color, responses varied from light skin, white, brown, darker or slightly darker, tanned, creole, not white or black, chocolate-colored skin, black, olive skin, beautiful, normal.

Colorblindness is a constant in the countries’ reports, thus very little investigated for different groups such as Roma ethnic. Romania, for example, until present did not sign align its Penal Code with the UN Convention against Racism<sup>3</sup>, Italy failed to address issues of racism in its jurisprudence and Finland doesn’t have clear strategies and policies against racism. (*see report on legal analyses prepared for this project*)

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information about convention and Romania’s report on racism <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-romania-romanian-translation-/168094c9e7>



In Europe, skin tone discrimination has been paid very little attention in social sciences, many reports produced for minority groups failing to include it as a factor when evaluating access to services, education and life achievements. Moreover, within the anti-racism frameworks, skin tone segmentation has not been investigated, reports elaborated at the EU level focus on minority groups, immigrant status and Afro-American descendants<sup>4</sup>.

Scientific reports made by black Americans studies showed that people with lighter skinned tone have better jobs, increased access to services and social acceptance compared with dark skin (Reece 2020, Kreisman&Rangel 2015). A similar conclusion was made within a research conducted in 2009 with a group of roma women employees (Mocanu,Gheorghe, Zamfir 2009). Women were asked if they are treated differently by their employers or colleagues at the working place and they declared that the darker their skin color was, the bigger the risk to be discriminated against. The current analysis highlight experiences of multiple and intersectional discrimination in housing, education, health and social services, as well as in employment, where skin tone is a proxy, along with others, which will be investigated in the next chapters. Women's experiences of skin tone segmentation prove the necessity to introduce it in the intersectionality frameworks.

*“I remember a teacher who made us, Roma children, take off our shoes and socks to check if our feet were clean. In some cases, then, if a Roma child had not done his/her homework, this fact was considered very serious. If, on the other hand, a Gadgé child didn't do his homework, it wasn't a problem.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“Sometimes I don't like how G. is treated by one teacher, but I don't speak about it with the child. Moreover, consider that **sometimes she cries because she would like to have pink skin, not black.**” (Interview 18, Italy)*

*“I didn't know how to explain this feeling, I just knew that I did not feel good at school: some Gadgé children used to look at me with disdain and laughed. I identify myself as a person with darker skin, compared to Italian Gadgé.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

---

<sup>4</sup> For more Information check the FRA report 2018 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-being-black-in-the-eu\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-being-black-in-the-eu_en.pdf)



*"(...) In high school I started noticing this thing about skin color (...) it was related to how I was perceived as a Roma girl from a Roma community, who spoke the language and everybody from my class knew about it, and the way she was perceived, who was way darker than me, always wearing make-up, long haired - that visible type of Roma girl." (Interview 20, Romania)*

*"There was a teacher who treated us, Roma, very badly. We were the B-series students and he humiliated us, he checked if we stank. He also despised me for my illness: he always treated me very badly, with an attitude of offense. He made me take off my shoes and said to me: "Let me see if you washed your feet". He did the same with the other Roma too. **My skin is almost white.**" (Interview 4, Italy)*

As seen, school represents the first formal interaction with the "gadge world" and the discriminatory treatment applied discourages them from early stages. When they cannot hide identity due to skin tone and residence (ex. Roma community/neighborhood or camps), they face a discriminatory treatment, exclusion from class and therefore the risk of dropping out of school becomes higher. Colorism because of the ambiguity of identity remains consistent across gender identity, social status and ethnicity, providing information about treatment from gadge people, access to education etc. For example, in situations where Roma women do not come out and assume their ethnic/sexual identity but the skin tone is darker, the probability to still be discriminated against and disadvantaged is still high, but the sexual identity is invisible. And, as Alcoff (2005) points out, it is very important to feel comfortable with your identities, as hiding them can develop traumas.

*"Concerning the skin issue, I tried to solve it in my first year of college... I wished I earned so much money that I could bleach my skin. **Do you know how I realized that I have a skin color issue?** The moment I said: "yes, but I am white here because the sun doesn't catch me. My skin is black only here." (Interview 1, Romania)*

*"I like it this way - a slightly darker color. If I tan, **it looks ugly, as if I were dirty.**" (Interview 6, Romania,)*

*"There are some who make you [feel discriminated], some who say this one is Black, or she is ugly. There are many methods through which they make you [feel discriminated] ... And if she*





*was white, there would be no difference. But like this... with the color, there are some who pick on you..." (Interview 8, Finland)*

*"I am not white. I remember when I was a little girl, being white in țigănie was considered something to be proud of, but I realized it is not like that because I have seen căldărari and pletoși with white skin and green eyes. I consider myself creole." (Interview 2, Romania)*

Inherently, essentialists beliefs derive from these processes that ethnicity is a given, fixed in time, without questionings, gender norms, sexual identities or other conventions perpetuated from generation to generation.

*"Changing things is very difficult because Roma have a closed mind on this topic, but perhaps slowly things can change, as happened for women: first women didn't wear pants, didn't cut their hair, didn't put make-up on. Women who wore a short skirt were seen as prostitutes. Now things have changed: I wear short hair, for example." (Interview 3, Italy)*

## Coping strategies

Roma women participants in the research respond in different ways to the situations they encountered. General prejudices against Roma determined them to have a negative perception of Roma. That is why there is a tendency to dissociate oneself from the negative perception about Roma, by constant justifying their 'ethnicity' and social status: 'I never stole', 'I am clean', 'I'm not violent', 'I was taught to behave and be respectful', 'I'm a beggar but I don't steal'.

*"I'm Roma, but I've never stolen, I've never killed anyone". At the beginning, they remained like statuettes. I told them: "If you want me not to work for you anymore, just tell me". (Interview 15, Italy)*

*"I always knew that I am Roma. It's just that it took me a while to accept myself as a Roma because when I was in school or in the orphanage, people used to call me "gypsy". I had a little*





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*trauma caused by my skin color and my hair, but later I realized that this was an asset.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

*“I am not ashamed of being a gypsy, but of living in the camp, sometimes I am ashamed, because sometimes people think badly of you, they think that you are dirty like the others who live in the camp, that you steal like the others who live in the camp.” (Interview 14, Italy)*

*“Perhaps, the only moment was when I arrived in a Roma camp here in Italy, but I was not a child. I have dark skin.’ (Interview 1, Italy)*

While women are taught to be proud of their ethnicity, one of the first coping strategy to deal with their identity is hiding it. On the other hand, when it comes to their children, they always pass on the same values of being proud of their identities, valorizing skin color to dismantle negative perception and traumas associated with that and take a stance when teachers discriminate against their children.

Stories of being proud, living the “Roma life at home” are antagonized by the process of hiding their identities in public because of racism, past persecution during the Nazi regime remembered by family, attacks from far-right groups, losing a job, denying access to services, microaggressions at school and homophobia. They are told to be proud, but to not to tell they are Roma to gadje people as a protective act to the dangers they can face if they are exposed.

*“When I was a teenager, and he [ed.. father] met me on the street with my friends, he used to avoid greeting me because he didn't want people to identify me as a gypsy and as a gypsy from the camp.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

Hiding identity is a coping strategy usually adopted by the respondents who identify as light skin color, but also by lesbians for whom sexual identity is not visible. Loosing accent because of Roma language, avoiding to speak Romanes in public, dressing as “the gadje women”, avoiding being friends with Roma kids and blending in with non-Roma, hiding their residence so that there are no affiliations with Roma, lessons dictated “don’t get marry young”, being “feminine” as lesbian to avoid aggressions, struggling to work better, to be clean, to purse higher



education are everyday life experience of Roma women who have lighter skin and can pass as whites.

*“I had a double life: at home we lived our identity, at school and out of our home, we hid our identity. We were just refugees from the Balkan war, that's it, we were not Roma.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

*“No matter how hard I try to avoid the sunlight, if I expose myself a bit to the sun, I turn black instantly. And she [her sister] is white, beautiful. And when I saw her talking to the doctors, surrounded by her friends, I was afraid I would embarrass her. (...) I kept my distance from her because I thought I would make her feel embarrassed by me.” (Interview 15, Romania,)*

*“I knew I was Roma but my mother told me not speak about it at school. When I used to go to school, Roma people were even more discriminated against, than they are today. (..)My mom told me not to be with the other kids of the camp when I was in school, even if they were in my same classroom. She told me to stay with the Italians.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“I always knew I was Roma and at home, when I was a child, I remember my family speaking about racism and discrimination towards the "gypsies". My family warned me and told me to avoid speaking about my Romani belonging, for example in the employment field, if I had to apply for a job position in other cities.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

For the Roma women with a darker skin tone, as shown before, situations of harassment, racism or micro-aggressions happen during their lives and they learn to ignore, distance themselves or, in rare cases, to fight back.

Fear of retaliation is present in the conversation, due to past events that members of their families were victims, shame because of the negative stereotypes, fear of labels, lesbophobia and transphobia. The distrust in society determined them to hide and deny their identities. The negative perception about the Roma is widespread and the effort put in combating it relies solely on them, in the lack of inclusive measures with respect to diversity. Thus, they do not agree with denying identities as family values feed their pride as ethnics, but rather adopt the strategy of what to tell and where, according to how safe it is in a given working place, or school environment.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“In my opinion, the denial of identity goes hand in hand with the level of anti-Gypsyism of our society: it is a defense tool. I had my mother who was very keen to reclaim our ethnic identity. In Romani she used to tell me: “You have ‘gypsy’ blood”. She told me we shouldn't be ashamed of our identity, she always told us we should be proud of it.” (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“They didn't teach us to be ashamed of being Roma, as long as we worked, didn't steal – that was a shame, they taught us about these things. As long as you work and you are respectful, you have nothing to be ashamed of by saying you are Roma, ever.” (Interview 19, Romania)*

Strategies present different types of coping, depending on the environment and have different outcomes. For example, for straight Roma women with different social status, the probability to find more emotional support within their families is higher compared to lesbians and transgender women. The experience of discrimination is doubled by the stigma associated with being a lesbian or transgender woman and therefore their backlash from the family faces multiple perspectives: dealing with strict gender norms, racism, hiding their sexuality and sexual desire and, in some cases, facing arranged marriage or facing violence within the family after starting the transitioning.

*“I grew up knowing I was Roma, we never talked about this topic. In my family, the problem has always been my homosexuality, my diversity, the fact that I behaved like a girl. We never talked about the fact of being Roma: we just were (and are), Roma. They didn't use to tell me to avoid speaking about my ethnic identity.” (Interview 20, Italy)*

*“When I was a teenager, I didn't want to admit that I was and am homosexual. My Gadgé family didn't talk to me about LGBT+ much, even though the environment was left-wing. When I told them I was homosexual, they didn't take it very well, but they took it even worse when I told them I was Roma, and now they don't accept the fact that I dress traditionally.” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“I felt discriminated against because of my feminine attitude. People used to discriminate and insult me since I was about 10 years old. Before that age, even if I felt different, my family didn't understand the situation and therefore I was still considered as “normal” by my relatives. I was discriminated against also by the Gadgé, not due to my Romani identity, but because of my homosexuality.” (Interview 20, Italy)*



Particularly for Roma transgenders involved in this research, navigating their identities is very difficult, marked in all situations by separation from their families after their coming out.

*“If you want to hide it, you can hide it, but you live badly. On the contrary, if you do what I did, if you declare your homosexuality, you can stop hiding it, but you are excluded, in the sense that people do not consider you in a positive way.” (Interview 20, Italy)*

*“As a LGBT+ person, you will never feel treated with respect within the Roma community or in the neighborhood. Even nowadays, you won’t get respect as a LGBT+ person.” (Interview 2, Romania)*

*“I have two obstacles to overcome: that of homosexuality and that of being Roma. Consider that there is discrimination even among minorities, there are minorities of minorities: for example, I am discriminated against from the Xoraxané, who are usually dark, because I’m white. And then, even among LGBT+, people are racist towards Roma... In short, it’s complicated.” (Interview 13, Italy)*

Roma lesbians and transgender women delay situations of coming out to their family, being afraid of confrontations, potential conflicts and distance from them. Although, during the interviews, they showed pride of their Roma roots and of their sexual identity, the discriminatory treatment which comes both in relation with Roma and non-Roma affects their position. That is why, for some of them, coming out to their family happened when they were adults, when they felt ready or decided to separate from the family and find communities of LGBT+ people.

*“To be Roma and LGBT+ is a double challenge in society. It’s quite challenging, you know? It’s difficult. And many don’t ever accept that they are Roma, although they look Roma from a mile away. You see them, but they say, “No, bro, I am not Roma, I have nothing to do with them, I am Dutch” ... okay (she laughs). But for many, it is quite hard to admit it, and I am perfectly aware of this. I mean, I don’t know, there should be support groups from organizations because it is very challenging!” (Interview 10, Romania)*

Avoiding conflicts is also a strategy to cope with situations they face in their daily life and prevents them from being too overwhelmed or from taking care of their children. This does not



mean they are unable to depict it, as it is linked with a long list of experiences where they have been discouraged. Every experience of discrimination they face since early stages where they did not have the social and institutional support, shows a history of discouragement. All respondents mentioned conflict situations where they were discriminated against, either at school, job or in relation with others.

*“It is also in a way depressing: I work, I study at the same time for my second degree, I raise my child, I am an honest member of this society, I do everything I can to kind of get into this society, to be allowed to be a part of it. And what is the result: you are always shown your place, you are worthy of animals. It makes me think: why do I even try? Why do I do all this if I will never be accepted?” (Interview 18, Finland)*

*“We are always targeted because we are gypsies. People don’t trust us. They think we steal or we are about to do something bad... So, always avoid these situations! If you see a man who swears at you, you take a step back and go a different way.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“I sometimes speak to myself when I am in a store (...)and I ask myself why they don’t treat us with respect, what have we done to them. Why Romanians don’t want to respect us as they respect each other. What can we do? You can’t argue with them either, can’t quarrel. We let ourselves down, and we do what they tell us.” (Interview 18, Romania)*

## Antagonisms

The negative image of Roma women identity is overrepresented in all interviews. Roma women participants in the research share stories on how they were labeled, judged or excluded in mostly all spheres of life in which they interact with non-Roma: in school, at the workplace, when shopping or going out with their family, when begging, while accessing social services or health care.



Homogenous view on Roma women's identity from non Roma constitutes a constant struggle to get out of patterns associated with them especially in interaction with gadge people, public servants. On the other hand there are antagonism across the group's view about social class, roma kinship, skin tone and sexual orientation. Above all, when talking about gender identity, many of the respondents show reactions of homophobia or denial of existence of these categories proving that roma LGTB+ rights are still not even a conversational topic.

Their family models counteract with the representations perpetuated in the media, but also challenge the gender norms perpetuated for generations within the family. Among those who are mentioned as role models are mothers, sisters who pursued higher education and have a god job, other women in extended families, LBGT+ friends who challenge heteronormativity.

*“My mother was illiterate until the age of 38-40, but she wanted to emancipate herself by taking her driving license. To get the driver's license you need to know how to read. Thus, she decided to go back to school: she took the eighth-grade diploma, as well as the driving license.”*

*(Interview 8, Italy,)*

*“Today it is a bit more accepted that women work, also because, today, life is very expensive. My brother's wife, for example, is a mother and a wife, but she also works in the supermarket, and this is accepted.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“(...) Fortunately, in my family, I have not had these problems and I have always told my son that love has no barriers, that there can be love between people of the same sex and that this must absolutely not constitute a stigma. However, among the Roma community, things are quite the opposite: people are often laughed at and made fun of. These are the same mechanisms that occur among non-Roma society.” (Interview 11, Italy)*

At the same time, there are signs of changes within family relations and gender norms criticized by most of the respondents, who disobey rules, identity inequalities between boys and girls, challenge the gender binary or do activism in Roma communities. Breaking patterns when the image of Roma is constructed in a narrow way is not an easy task, especially when it is not supported through institutional mechanisms. Gender norms are considered restrictive and come with taboos about women's sexuality.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“My parents' generation, there is the idea that women should grow up with modesty: for example, they must marry the person with which they lose their virginity. I was the first of my relatives not to marry the person with whom I lost my virginity.” (Interview 10, Italy)*

*“When I went with several Roma women to the board meeting or the mayor, they always asked us to wait, or sometimes, they talked to us from the door, and when we went to the board meeting, they would sit down, while we were standing.” (Interview 6, Romania)*

*‘My Roma family reacted well to my homosexuality, because they were so happy to see me, to meet me again, that they were not interested in my homosexuality, they didn't care. (...) However, many Roma groups do not accept homosexuality. I know that most Roma don't accept it. Anyway, I think that the situation of LGBT+ people in the Roma community can improve in some way.’*  
(Interview 13, Italy)

*“I felt that form of patriarchy within my family, the men were considered future successful businessmen of the family, they carry on the family name, while the women are the ones leaving their parents' home.” (Interview 2, Romania)*

Within these contexts, Roma LGBT+ and Roma women became the voices that challenge dominant factors which hold the symbolic power to make invisible their experience. Because the culture of patriarchy, as any other historical phenomenon, does not rely on diversity of identities and inclusion, but rather supports its systems on antagonisms, cultural domination and subordination.

*“Sexual orientation was not much talked about when I was young, not in my family and not too much in the society either, since those were the times. I only became aware of my identity and in a subtle way open about it to my family much later, as an adult. My relatives have been supportive of me, but I must say that the Roma community is very strict and traditional, when it comes to gender and sexuality.” (Interview 2, Finland)*





## Conclusions

In this chapter we explored along with Roma women how categories of identities and experiences are influenced in the interaction with family, community/neighborhood and the gadje world. Navigating through categories of identities is quite challenging as proved in all conversations with women. The family environment is a place where different categories of identity interact, such as ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, social status, but the experience of them becomes very difficult when in interaction with the gadje world they are either forced to choose between or predetermined for them due to color proxy or residence (camps, roma community). Roma possess identities characterized by hybridity but in everyday life it is almost impossible to manifest intersectionality as long as their identities are treated in a uniaxial dimension.

Most of the 62 Roma women involved in the research share a common story of racism and/or discrimination within their first interaction with the gadje world. School in that sense represents the first space where they acknowledge being Roma is negative. The constant treatment they get because of their ethnicity affects one identity category over another, causing lifelong discouragement and distrust in gadje institutions. Skin tone, Roma clothes, Romanes language and residence (camps or Roma community) are catalyzers for positive or negative experiences in public places. The interaction with the gadje world happens in negative terms with lack of respect for history, culture and diversity, therefore cultivating the sense of pride on ethnic identity falls under the responsibility of Roma family. In the lack of state intervention and support, identity becomes a personal matter where experiences of trauma from racism and oppressions are passed on verbally from generation to generation. Women share intergenerational trauma and cope with it collectively, in family. For lesbian and transgender women is more difficult to find such support due to lesbo-transphobia within their families.

The political context of a country becomes even more relevant as women who migrate carry with them stories of deportation, persecutions suffered by their families during Samudaripen/Holocaust, Yugoslavian war, communism policies, dictatorship in Romania, life in





segregated camps or informal settlements. These experiences are invisibilized and women have to identify coping strategies to make a better life for them and their families. The countries of destination and origin can be quite determined for identity categories, as color blindness in Europe is still a recurrent phenomenon, with very little attention paid in research especially to minority groups. Women testified that even if they don't come out and assume their ethnic/sexual identity, if their skin tone is dark, they were bullied and discriminated against. Women's experiences of skin tone segmentation prove that it is more than necessary to introduce it when addressing intersectionality.

With a long list of experiences when they were discouraged, facing constant micro-aggressions and harassments in school, on the streets, at working place, in relation with different services and within the family for having a different sexual orientation, women develop coping strategies as forms of self-protection and mechanism to pursue their goals where the legal mechanism failed to include them. Hiding or denying identity when the skin tone is lighter, avoiding situations, conflicts where they are discriminated against and harassed are doubled by the intergenerational trauma they inherit within the family due to different persecutions.

The pressures applied in interactions with the others, to either give up different identity categories or to choose between them is doubled by the lack of political measures and makes it almost impossible for intersectionality to be consciously developed as discourse and then addressed. As the Roma dominant identity categories continue to be defined by the others and dealt with in different ways by women, gender norms develop restrictive and unquestioned. Within this context, Roma women, lesbians and transgender becomes important voices that challenge the dominant narratives of Roma, heteronormativity, women's position and gadje world.

Therefore, analyzing the interactions between different "worlds" is crucial to understand how intersectionality works in cases of Roma women, LGBT+ and minority groups. Transiting between one space to another where identities are treated and addressed uni-dimensional as revealed in this chapter, leaves Roma women with no spaces to develop intersectionality. Policy recommendations and measures with regards to intersectionality can be understood and applied



only when the life course, contexts and analyses between categories are analyzed and conceptualized in interaction.



#### 4. HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Family members, being mothers and taking care of their house are very important dimensions for Roma women identity. As we will see in the following chapters, most of Roma girls and women are raised in a gendered model with strict roles for being wives, mothers and daughters, being raised to become primary caregivers for their family members and responsible from lower ages for housework such as cleaning and taking care of their siblings.

When asked about housing conditions, most of the Roma women responded on how their living situation was in fact favorable for them or not to perform the role of wives, mothers and daughters. Even when housing conditions do not meet their needs, Roma women complained mostly on how their situation does not allow them to be the best wives and mothers, speaking about how their children are affected by living in poor houses and neighborhoods.

*“My neighborhood is good, and my living conditions are good too. If I think of the Roma camp where my Roma family lives, the condition is completely different. It is horrible and very far from the urban fabric, without even bus connections. In recent years, the conditions have worsened even more, but before too they were terrible.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

*“My Roma family lives in decent conditions, apart from my mother, who is unfortunately in a serious state of housing emergency.” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“The children cried for a TV, and I didn’t have electricity. And I prayed day and night to God, and I put electricity.” (Interview 8, Romania)*

*“We are a family with seven children, and as I told you, there were times when we were even more humble than we are now. We used to have no water, but now we have ... but we have a feeling of sadness because we were not able to offer better conditions for our children. We*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*managed to install the plumbing for a kitchen sink, but things are worse with the bathroom.”*

*(Interview 15, Romania)*

Most of the Roma women are satisfied with their housing conditions, even if words like “small, but cozy” or “small, but good” appear among the narratives of women. But most of the Roma women do not have higher expectations about housing conditions and facilities, sometimes being content only with some stability of their living conditions. Having a place of their own is far more important, as their past experiences were harsh.

*“To have a roof over your head it’s a radical change. It’s very important to have water, electricity, identity documents. Back in time, when we were little, we didn’t even have IDs. There was a lack of IDs within our community. If you don’t own a house, you can’t have an ID. The lack of IDs was a terrible issue. And yes, now, I feel more privileged than other who do not have an ID card, but in terms of discrimination there is the same shit as always, because nothing has changed.”* (Interview 2, Romania)

*“At this point, I am thankful to God for being fine. Compared to others, I am doing fine. I had 2 rooms, and many times - God knows - I used to sleep on the floor.”* (Interview 7, Romania)

### Crowded neighborhoods, crowded houses

Many of our respondents live in marginalized places or neighborhoods, overcrowded houses, in camps or shelters such as in the case of Italy and Romania. Even if Finland has a better social housing policy, it is still inaccessible for the Roma women considered “undocumented migrants”. One of the subsections of the chapter address the Roma women living for years on the streets and in night shelters in Finland.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

Roma women were asked if their housing conditions are up to their needs, twelve assessing them is rather unappropriated. Most<sup>5</sup> of those complaining about their housing are living in communities inhabited mostly by Roma persons, such as camps, illegal settlements or segregated communities, Roma communities in rural areas.

According to our respondents in most of the cases there are no significant investments from the part of local authorities in improving the lives of those living in Roma communities and neighborhoods. Crowded houses and crowded camps and communities are linked to frequent argues and poor relations among neighbors. Thus, Roma women are practically entrapped in situations in which they lose even the basic support of families and communities in their struggle to cope with shortages and poverty. In some cases, they mention the lack of contracts on their names.

*“The camp here is bad, even if there is light and water, and even heating. In recent years, the situation has worsened, not improved. “ (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“Here in the camp, it's bad to live all together, and it's normal to argue. I would like to leave the camp for this too, but above all because here you live like an animal, not like human beings.”  
(Interview 6, Italy)*

*“Bosnian houses are better than ours. I have a caravan, which is my room, with a bed, television and my clothes. ... I would like to have a real home. In the caravan, I have no comfort, but I am satisfied, because there are Italians who do not even have this. ...” (Interview 7, Italy)*

*“There are a few of us sharing an apartment. Because the Finnish person who found me work, they took that apartment there and they put in more people there. It is what it is ... My own place would be better, not to live with so many people in one apartment, too many arguments and I don't like it” (Interview 5, Finland)*

*“.. whenever I looked for a house, I wanted it to be somewhere where Roma people live because they are my people. I've always thought of this. Indeed, I once went to see a house with a yard,*

---

<sup>5</sup> Eleven out of twelve. The question was not addressed to women living on streets and being sheltered during nights or winters.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*but there were too many Roma. They were so many that you couldn't breathe. There was a girl on the fence who would come into my house.” (Interview 4, Romania)*

*“I live with my mother-in-law, and from time to time, my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law are coming by. It's a struggle having three grown-up children. I don't have my own house, and my kids don't have separate bedrooms. I live with my mother-in-law, and it's problematic.”*

*(Interview 14, Romania)*

*“I had no money to buy a house. I wanted to sell this house because we don't have enough space, we are very crowded, and I wanted to sell it, but no one was interested because the place is tiny, there is no place to plant an onion, something to eat, so I no longer sold it. We are many people in the house as it is, but we live like that, what choice do we have? We sleep a bit crowded, in two rooms, there are 13 people. We only have two beds.” (Interview 14, Romania)*

Some of the houses are made from low quality construction materials, hardening the lives and housework of Roma women. Speaking about their houses some of them use terms such as “small” or “tiny”, Roma women putting a lot of effort to make them cozy and appropriate for their family needs.

*“The container [the camp is made of containers and shacks, ed.] is very small, it is made of a material that after a while makes you feel suffocated. Perhaps, breathing this material also causes cancer, many Roma have died of cancer. I always clean and I'm fine inside the house, but there are lots of mice outside.” (Interview 14, Italy)*

*“Before the AAC bricks were not used in construction, or even if these materials were used, we could not afford it because we did not have money. So, we had to build our house out of mud bricks. And until we managed to rebuild our little house, we lived there, on the backwater shore, with two kids, unfortunate and tormented. Yes, we have memories, we do not have very beautiful memories.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

Lack of a residence for those not having “a roof over their head” makes almost impossible any step to access loans, putting women in the situations of taking risky decisions for them and their families.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“If you want to get a loan to buy a house or land, or you simply want a personal loan, no bank will approve it as long as you have a provisional ID. In this situation, yes, you are discriminated against. You practically do not exist, even if you have a birth or marriage certificate.” (Interview 3, Romania)*

*“It is our house built on a plot of land... I don't know how to explain to you... we should not have built there because it's a flood-prone land... The first time, we lived with my mother-in-law. Because many people were living there, we were overcrowded, so we struggled to build this little house on a backwater shore. But when we were satisfied that we managed to build the house - we had two children, a girl and a boy - the flood came and took away our house, and we had to go back to my mother-in-law.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

#### Infrastructure and utilities that serve community or neighborhood

Maybe the most important issue related to the lives of Roma families in communities and camps inhabited mostly by Roma are the poor access to infrastructure and inexistent or poor utilities serving the communities. The lack of adequate utilities and infrastructure put girls and women in vulnerable positions for their entire life, limiting their access to proper education, health services and labor market. Most of complaints are related to sewage utilities, but also to the lack or poor quality of sanitation services serving Roma communities and camps.

*“There are shops and buses here in this neighborhood, but living in the camp is very bad and this camp has also deteriorated in recent years, it is dirtier and there are more shacks. ... It sucks here, there are so many rats. There is water and electricity, but this field is too dirty. The sewers break, the sweepers don't come for the garbage. A while ago we called some people to fix the sewers.” (Interview 4, Italy)*

*“Here at the camp, there is no drinking water, there is no electricity. Once I washed myself with non-potable water and ended up in the hospital. It is really bad to live in the camp. For those who do not have a car it is even worse, because it is very far from everything, there are no buses*



*and also to receive mail is a problem because the mail does not arrive, it gets lost.” (Interview 6, Italy)*

*“We do not have toilets in our homes here in the camp, while in the other part of the camp [the part of the Bosnian Roma, ed], there are containers and each container has a bathroom ... The people of the Municipality came to put electricity here, many years ago, but now that the bathroom is breaking [the bathroom shared by all the inhabitants of the camp, which is located in the center of the settlement, ed.], they still didn’t come.” (Interview 7, Italy)*

Another struggle for Roma women when it comes to housing conditions is related to lack of adequate roads or to the lack of adequate public transportation serving communities. Living in poverty and having no adequate public transportation serving Roma communities push women to inactivity and marginalization for their entire life.

*“The buses I have to tell the truth, there are, but they don't run very often. Sometimes I wait up to an hour, in fact most of the time I walk.” (Interview 14, Italy)*

*“They made a little road (she is laughing), I signed for sewage. There were no conditions before when I took this house, no water, no electricity.” (Interview 8, Romania)*

*“The situation is very bad. I have been struggling for a sewage system and a street lighting pole for five years. I was told to pay for it. They told us to pave the street ourselves. It belongs to the municipality, doesn’t it? Is it my street? No, it is not. ... First, and foremost, the Mayor does not want to hear about this neighborhood. We cannot take a bath or use the washing machine because we have no sewage system. He told us he could not pave it as it is just an alley. Go and check the Romanians' side. The big road he built is a pleasure to look at. They cut the grass and the bushes, while here it's like a horror movie. And the mayor told us: “your neighborhood will look nice when I will no longer be mayor.” (Interview 9, Romania)*





## Hiding the place of living in interactions with the gadje world

Coming from a poor community and low socio-economic background expose children and women not only to hardened lives, but also to harassment, different treatment and discrimination based on social class dimension. Ethnicity, having large families as well as poverty could act in different situations separately, all together or compound as triggers for experiences of discrimination, trauma and humiliation.

*“I was living as a child in an area with cheap rental apartments provided by the city. This meant that we were seen as the “poor” ones in the area, and this had more to do with our socio-economic situation than ethnic identity. But obviously in our treatment those two were mixed a lot. I felt different when going to school, but after that not so much.” (Interview 17, Finland)*

*“I am not ashamed of being a gypsy, but of living in the camp sometimes I am ashamed, because sometimes people think badly of you, they think that you are dirty like the others who live in the camp, that you steal like the others who live in the camp. ...When I go to other areas, I try not to say that I live in the camp. I say about the neighborhood but not about the camp.” (Interview 14, Italy)*

*“I never had to hide the name of my neighborhood, but I always preferred not to say explicitly that my Roma family came from the camp. I always knew it could be a problem: not the fact of being a Roma, but the fact of being a Roma coming from a “Roma camp” (Interview 12, Italy)*

To avoid being stigmatized as living in poor communities some of the interviewed Roma women tried mostly in relation to accessing the labor market to hide their place of residence.

*“I have never looked for a job with the contract but to my children it happened that when they went to do interviews things were fine until they had to say where they lived: when they said “camp”, the boss did not make them work.” (Interview 6, Italy)*



## Right to renting and buying houses

Accessing an adequate house that meets personal or family needs could be challenging for Roma women. Roma women from all three countries where interviews were carried out had experiences of being denied their right to renting or buying a house or heard about such experiences among their family members, friends or beneficiaries.

Entering into the private market of renting and buying houses opens the door for discrimination and harassment. Nine women entrusted us with their stories of discrimination in renting and buying houses, many more the stories of their family members and friends, while other 18 not even tried to do such, mostly due to their poor financing resources.

Intersections of ethnicity with gender, sexual identity or motherhood deepens the problems that Roma women and their families have to face when trying to find a home up to their needs. In most of the narratives Roma women underlined that they had the needed financial resources, but their access to housing was hardened or restricted. Some of the women also pointed out that they had to pay more to finally get access to a rented house.

*” It happened to me when I left the camp. They said no once, when I wanted to rent a house, even though I had the money. I'm sure those owners were racist.” (Interview 10, Italy)*

*” Yes, it happened to me several times when I arrived in Italy. Nobody wanted to rent their houses to me, even though I had a lot of cash, as I had just sold my big house, as well as job and all. It took me 6 months to find a house to rent, because the owners knew about my Romani belongings, so they refused to rent their houses to me.” (Interview 18, Italy)*

*” There have been situations that I have heard that some condominiums / housing cooperatives, private ones, simply do not approve of a Roma family living in their apartments. It can be very openly stated, even in different documents... There is still this stereotypical thought that if a Roma moves into an apartment, soon all of their relatives will live in the same place, and it is impossible to get them out. And there are many other stereotypes as well, like “why do you Roma wash so much laundry?”” (Interview 18, Finland)*



*” During the evacuation, I started calling, and there were lots of people answering the phone, and the first thing they would ask was:” Are you a Roma?” And I would say “yes”. And they would hang up the phone immediately, not without telling me: “I am sorry. There’s nothing more to discuss.” Or they would ask me all sorts of things and refuse to rent me for two reasons: I have small children and they do not accept a tenant with small children, and the second reason is that I am a Roma. So, some were bothered by the fact that I am Roma, others that I have small children.” (Interview 3, Romania)*

*” People are not willing to rent you an apartment when they see you are a transgender woman, maybe they would finally accept the fact that you are Roma, but not that you are a transgender. Either you pay double, as I pay here, you pay the right amount and shut his mouth and he would not care what you are anymore.” (Interview 2, Romania)*

*” Until I came to live here, I would call people to schedule a house viewing, but the moment they saw me, they would claim being sick, busy, and that they can no longer show me the place, and this didn’t happen just once ...” (Interview 5, Romania)*

Sometimes racist decisions are taken by gadje women or men, even if they are not economically rational, refusing to sell their houses to Roma families.

*” Before building my house here, I wanted to buy somewhere else, but that Romanian woman refused to sell it. She told me, “I don’t want to sell it to gypsies.” And that old man died, and I was calling her, we were begging her to sell us the house as we had two kids and I didn’t want to live with my parents-in-law. But she said, “I won’t sell it to gypsies. I’d rather let the house fall down than sell it to gypsies.” ... And even now, she didn’t sell the house. Every time I pass by, I say, “look, the house is still there.” (Interview 17, Romania)*

Passing as non-Roma (white or migrants) can “help” Roma women to find adequate places to live in good neighborhoods and in houses up to their needs. Some of the women succeeding to rent a house were or became aware that they were in fact treated as non-Roma.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*” No, they never refused us, but they didn't know we were Roma. Consider that, even people who do not know that we are Roma, actually know that we are foreigners with origins from ex.*

*Yugoslavia.” (Interview 8, Italy)*

*” The owner of the house that I rented for 5 years, a person with whom I had a brilliant relationship, did not know about my ethnicity, not because I wanted to hide it, but because there was no opportunity to tell her. When I had to leave the house ... she told me: "I would never want to have gypsies or niggers in the house." At that point I told her: "You have had a gypsy at home for 5 years". She didn't believe it. I could write a book of jokes about the gaffes people make.” (Interview 11, Italy)*

*” I am laughing because one time, my brother and I went to rent a place and they started talking to us about our Roma neighbors, how terrible they were. And my brother and I were like:” But ma'am, do you see us? Don't you see we are gypsy, too?” I don't know. I think neither I nor my brother fit into the stereotypes of society. We look like Arabs or Persians, or whatever you want. We don't look like gypsies, and that's why people don't discriminate against us. (mocking) What have I become!” (Interview 1, Romania)*

*” If perceived as a foreigner, people would help you more rapidly than if they perceive you as Romanian and Roma. Okay, I didn't let my hair grow for that reason and it came bundled with some unexpected results.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

The hardened or lack of access of Roma women and families to adequate housing through renting and buying houses practically push them to neighborhoods or communities inhabited mostly by Roma, reproducing inequalities and spatial segregation. In other situations, Roma women and their families are practically forced to live in improper living conditions that do not meet the needs of their family members. Living in poor neighborhoods / communities impacts women's lives and house chores, impoverishing them with more responsibilities in taking care of their house and families and limiting their access to education, health, labor market and adequate incomes and social protection.

*“I had no money to buy a house. I wanted to sell this house because we don't have enough space, we are very crowded, and I wanted to sell it, but no one was interested because the place*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*is tiny, there is no place to plant an onion, something to eat, so I no longer sold it. We are many people in the house as it is, but we live like that, what choice do we have? We sleep a bit crowded, in two rooms, there are 13 people. We only have two beds.” (Interview 18, Romania).*

## Leaving the house / the neighborhood

Both living in neighborhoods and communities inhabited mostly by Roma or gadje could be challenging for Roma women. Decisions to leave their houses and communities could be on the one hand related to the needs of proper housing conditions and better access to social services for them and their children, but also due to safety reasons and to harassment and discrimination situations from gadje.

Nine women said they had thoughts of leaving their homes due to bad relations and harassment from the neighbors. But as only a minority of interviewed Roma women are living in rented houses, the number is in fact quite high. Situations of locative harassment and discrimination in some cases cover the entire life span of Roma women, some of them remembering they had to move since childhood.

*“In the other one people were complaining that I leave my car parked in front of other people’s doors and I make huge noise all the time. This was weird because at that point I did not have a car and I was almost never home, because I was working so hard – and if I was, I was silent and pretty much by myself. In that situation I could not see any other reason than they wanted to kick a Roma out of the apartment. I left myself, because the atmosphere was so hateful and disrespectful.” (Interview 18, Finland)*

*” But it’s not that I wanted to, they kicked us out. We’ve been through many houses. My mother used to wander around with us from house to house, because they kicked us out. They motif was that “we don’t want gypsies”. ” (Interview 2, Romania)*



The political environment and the rise of right movement makes the life of Roma women very difficult in their communities and the risks on women's physical and psychical health urge them to leave their houses and neighborhoods, Roma lesbians and trans women being one of the most exposed to hate motivated behaviors.

*“When, in 2014, the demonstrations organized by Casa Pound [far-right political movement, ed.] began, the threats against me also began. Initially, the threats were light, then they became heavy. Thus, I left the neighborhood for about seven months ... When the situation calmed down, I returned to the neighborhood. ... For a while, everything was quiet, but, in 2018, when there were all those cases of violence against Roma in Rome [a girl injured by a shot, a Roma family attacked because they had the right to access a public housing, Roma families attacked because they have brought by the institutions to a reception center], the situation has become again unlivable for me. Thus, one of the reasons why I decided to move is also this: I cannot live in a neighborhood where I am sometimes accepted and sometimes not.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

*“I moved from a rented place two years ago because I had some elderly neighbors, who watched everything I did, and since I am young, I can’t act like I am in a monastery (she laughs). People were coming to my place often, we were not loud, but friends were coming over, and they were watching to see who with who, they saw some gay people kissing in front of my door, and then I’ve heard all kinds of discussions, so I said, “We better go, there is no point”. And we moved out. I do not like arguing. I rather leave and mind my own business.” (Interview 10, Romania)*

*“I have two pairs of homophobic neighbors. They pick on my friends; they pick on me. The situation escalated into a physical aggression. And then, yes, I thought about moving somewhere else. But why should I move? ... Let me tell you something: when I was assaulted, I was slapped by one of the neighbors, and I could have been aggressive too, but I didn't and I felt good about myself. And that can be an asset in protecting myself, and that’s exactly what I did. I made a complaint because I was slapped, insulted and so on, and at this moment, the complaint I’ve made is pending.” (Interview 5, Romania)*



Roma women and families are alone in face of harassments, threats and hate and sometimes feel insecure in their environments. They are not trusted by neighbors, owners and not even by authorities.

*“I personally believe that if a neighbor wanted to kick me out, for any reason, it would be easy, because I am a Roma. Any story would be believed. This means we are not allowed to make any mistakes, not even small ones.” (Interview 18, Finland)*

*“I’ve thought of looking for another place to live because, in our times, not everyone is kind. They usually want to harm you, even if you do them no harm.” (Interview 14, Romania)*

### Accessing social housing

Housing deprivation is one of the most extreme situations of social exclusion, and access to proper and available housing is without doubt the way to fight against poverty, social deprivation and social exclusion. Data made available by Eurostat (ILC\_MDHO06A) for 2019 pointed out that on average cca. 4% of Europeans are in situation of housing deprivation<sup>6</sup>. Romania displays the highest rate of housing deprivation at European level, but being on a steady decreasing trend during the last ten years from cca. 25,3% in 2010 to only 14,2% in 2019. On the contrary, Finland displays the lowest rate of housing deprivation, being only up to 0,9% in 2019, while Italy is slightly above the European average with a rate of 5% in 2019.

According to 2012 Housing Europe Review<sup>7</sup> (CECODHAS Housing Europe, 2011) Romania is characterized by one of the lowest shares of social renting housing in the total housing stock with a value of 2,3%, even if the pattern of low importance put on social housing is rather

---

<sup>6</sup> According to Eurostat, severe housing deprivation rate is defined as the percentage of population living in the dwelling which is considered as overcrowded, while also exhibiting at least one of the housing deprivation measures. See definition at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Severe\\_housing\\_deprivation\\_rate](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Severe_housing_deprivation_rate)

<sup>7</sup> The report is working with data available for 2007 and 2008 but it could be expected that the share of social housing decreased during the last decade.





widespread among post-socialist countries. Finland (16%) scores among the counties with highest rates of housing available to social renting, while Italy is around the European average with a value of 5,3%.

The national policies related to social housing will definitely influence how the needs of vulnerable groups are met at community level. Throughout Europe, immigrants are among the most vulnerable groups, being systematically disadvantaged in access to social housing (EWSI, 2016). So even when European countries have extended programs of social housing or renting at a reduced price or fee, the immigration status in fact blocks the access of Roma women to social housing.

Post-socialist scholars in Romania analyzed housing reforms in terms of state-owned stock, urban development with disregard to people which were living in public buildings, privations and restitutions of national buildings and local policies supporting private companies/banks to build houses and increase credits for buying houses (Florea & Dumitriu, 2019, Vincze, 2017). These reforms were followed by the lack of investment's programs in building public houses and therefore the population at risk of poverty in society including Roma were among the most disadvantaged. Comparing with 1990 when the national housing stock in Romania was of 30%, in 2018 dramatically reduces to 1,24% in public property<sup>8</sup>. One important mention is that for Romanian's case, the social housing situation is unclear as the state doesn't differentiate between houses for different purposes and social categories of people. Therefore, when people apply for a social house the waiting time can be between 3 up to 10 years<sup>9</sup>.

### *Applying for social housing*

11 Roma women interviewed or their family members applied during their lifetime for a social house, but only a few were in fact living in a social house at the time of the interviews.

---

<sup>8</sup> National Institute for Statistic in Romania collected by activists within the Block for Housing <https://bloculpentrulocuire.ro>.

<sup>9</sup> According to a research made by The Housing Block (a non-formal group of activists fighting for housing rights)





Reasons for which some of the Roma families that could have been eligible for social housing didn't in fact consider to apply for are varying a lot: not knowing they have the right, immigrant status, bureaucracy, not meeting the requested criteria or that social houses supply do not meet the needs of Roma families.

*"We have never applied for a social house. Due to the fact of being foreigners, however, it has never happened to us to be refused either." (Interview 8, Italy)*

*"I've never asked for a social house. If they give it to you, they give it to you in neighborhoods that are far away, that you don't know, and then the apartments are small." (Interview 10, Italy)*

*"I have never done this. I didn't even apply for the social house because I don't know how to do it." (Interview 4, Italy)*

*"Because we don't know that there is such an option. A social – meaning that you pay less? ... Only now I hear about it." (Interview 19, Finland)*

Even if the number of interviews with Roma women migrants from the Eastern Europe countries is small and the number of those ever applying for a social house is even smaller, the reasons for which Roma women never considered to apply to social housing picture high bureaucracy and criteria that exclude from the beginning the most vulnerable (ex. the need to have a job, age limits, etc.). Roma women are discouraged from the scratch to apply to social housing.

*"I requested information for someone else here in the city hall, and it is very arduous. They demand a huge pile of documents and stuff, and it is in vain because they solve absolutely nothing." (Interview 10, Romania)*

*"I would have applied, but my husband is 43, and I am 36. There is an age limit of 35 to apply for social housing, but we exceeded this limit. It is one of the criteria for receiving housing or land for building a home. That's how things are in the city hall." (Interview 14, Romania)*

*"There is no way: you must have a job, to have... they have a lot of requirements. I have never had a house – to tell you the truth – sincerely, I never have had my own space, which I know it's mine." (Interview 22, Finland on Bulgarian experience)*



None of the women applying for social housing in Romania received an answer for their files, one of them applying more than ten years before and being evicted during her lifetime.

*“I have a social housing file submitted to the city hall of 3<sup>rd</sup> District, since 2008, before I was evicted, because I knew about the problem. I thought that at some point we would be kicked out, we didn’t know exactly when, but we were going to be kicked out. And unfortunately, we were kicked out”. (Interview 3, Romania)*

*“I’ve applied. For over ten years, I have been applying, and still no results, unfortunately. Anyway, in the last two years, I haven’t even renewed the documents. You have to renew the documents every year, to meet the scoring, but lately I haven’t done it because so much time has passed and I will definitely not be assigned any social housing. I was just thinking of renewing my application this year, but the chances to receive a house are very low.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

Perceptions and experiences on how authorities process the social housing files is significantly different from one country to another one. Roma women from Italy and Romania have quite opposite experiences in applying for social housing.

*“I had housing stability since I was 15 years hold. Until then, we lived in camps, in reception centers... I was 15 when we moved there but I really don't think that my parents were treated badly by the authorities.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

*“I have never applied for a social house, but my dad and my sister did. The public services behaved well with them, even when they came to the camp to check their situation.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“My house is a social house and I was treated well by the authorities.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*“I think in 2009 or 2010, there was a chief inspector at the Housing Department... You could have been the first on the list, but if you were a Roma, you wouldn’t get a house. He said not even in a million years would he assign social houses to Roma people. In his opinion, the Roma people did not deserve to have a house.” (Interview 3, Romania)*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“And it also happened when I was evicted and I went to the Registry Office within the Municipality to submit the social housing file... And this [ed. civil servant] when he saw me filing for social housing, started laughing at me and shouting out loud at his colleagues: “look at this girl who wants to receive social housing. Hahaha! And we, who work like fools, do not dare to file for housing, although we work here all day long and we pay monthly installments.”*

*(Interview 3, Romania)*

Interviewed women living in social houses are satisfied with the quality of their houses. They are aware of the fact that social houses can change for better the life course of the families in the most vulnerable situations.

*“I live in a social house that is comfortable. So that's okay, but I would like to live on my own [the interviewed lives with her sister and her father, ed.]” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“My house where I lived since I was 15 years is a beautiful home. It is a social house that has been assigned to us by the Municipality, but as a house, we lack nothing.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

### Living in social centers and night shelters

As said before, house deprivation is one of the major challenges that women can face during their lifetime. Women in extremely vulnerable positions (such as beggars or cans/plastic bottles collectors) and with migration status are among the beneficiaries of the night shelters in Finland, provided by non-profit organizations. The shelters provide adequate support during nighttime, but the extent to which it was adequate to family needs remained unaddressed by interviews. Even if their basic needs are addressed by the night shelters their daily lives and occupations make them extremely vulnerable to health damages. As living on the streets, women do not plan to bring their children in the destination country, their motherhood being severely challenged. Women are kindly talking of their children and families remaining behind and about their concerns with respect to children schooling or living conditions.



*“We get up in the morning, we wash ourselves and we leave. We take our bags, and we leave, to go to look for cans and if we find... I go to my district where I sit in one place by a grocery store, so that the bad people cannot harass me, I put my cup close to me and I beg, and who has a good heart throws me some coins. After I enter a store and buy a bag of food and when the time comes, I return to the social. With my husband, he sometimes begs, sometimes collects cans. That’s how we survive day by day.” (Interview 22, Finland)*

*“[About spending the nights before arriving to the night shelter], Under the bridges, in the parks... “(Interview 20, Finland)*

*“There are conditions because we have a place to wash our clothes, to warm our food, microwave, there is coffee in the morning and in the evening tea, biscuits, all we need, milk, sugar... we have a place to sleep, I mean we don’t sleep outside, we don’t sleep in the forest, we don’t sleep in tents in the cold. Here we have conditions. Because if we slept in the forest, the police would chase us. But like this... I thank them so much for having a place to stay, to sleep, it’s very nice here I thank them so much. And for washing clothes because this is important to have a place to take a shower. But if we slept outside in tents, where would we have washed?” (Interview 3, Finland)*

*“Compared to how it was before, it’s super. Ah well before we were in forests, in parks, in an abandoned building ...” (Interview 7, Finland)*

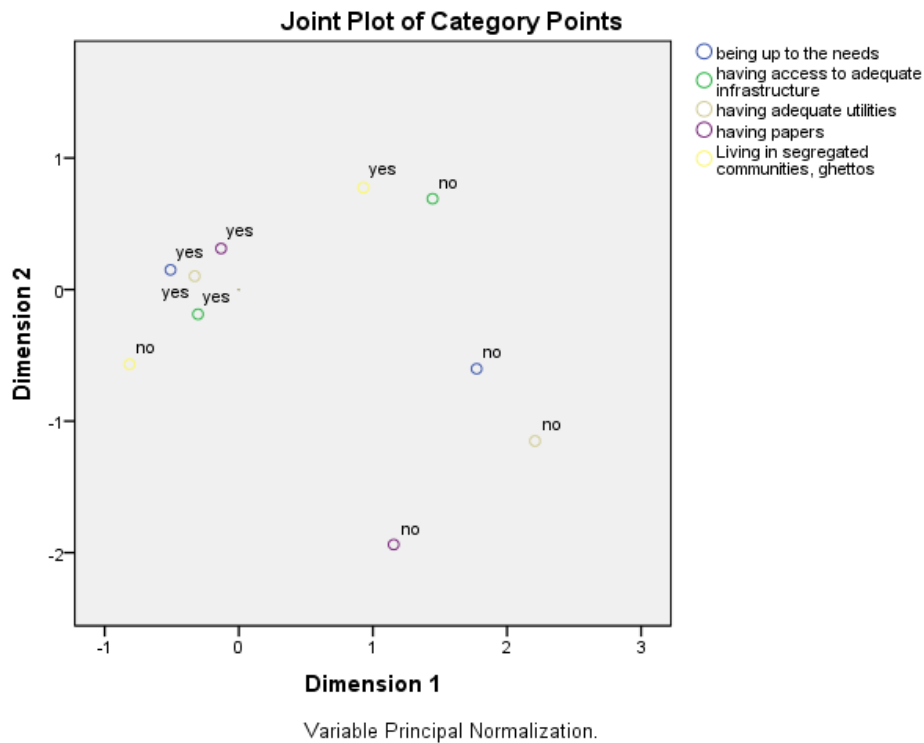
## Patterns of access to adequate housing, health services and labor market

First, we analyze the housing conditions according to the types of communities Roma women are living in. Then we will investigate the links between housing conditions and access to healthcare and labor market. Even if interviews are pointing out also to links between housing conditions and access and quality of education received, as interviews are focused on current housing conditions and not on those from childhood, we decided not to address links between housing and access to education in this section. As announced in the methodology section, we run

correspondence analyses in order to evidence patterns of associations between different variables characterizing housing conditions. Associations are easy to read and interpret: closer the cercles, stronger the associations.

As interviews pointed out, it is quite frequent for Roma living in segregated communities, ghettos or traditional communities to have poorer housing conditions compared with gadje communities. So, for the beginning, we tested the association between the type of community (represented by a composite variable comprising all types of communities inhabited mostly by Roma people – camps and segregated communities) and different features of an adequate standard of living.

**Figure 1. Correspondence analyses between the housing conditions and living in segregated communities (including ghettos)**





The figure above catches a clear pattern of association between living in a community inhabited mostly by Roma and the higher incidence of those reporting poor access to infrastructure (roads, transportation, street lightening, etc.). Even if some of the women interviewed also reported lack of adequate utilities or unclear situations with legal documents (ownership or renting contracts), the only striking pattern of association is related to lack of access to proper infrastructure. But lack of infrastructure also means poorer access to all the mechanisms facilitating the social integration, such as education, health and labor market. Where infrastructure such as roads and transportation facilities is poor, there is also a high probability of exclusion and marginalization and lack of access to all facilities needed for a decent standard of living. Also, lack of infrastructure puts Roma women to a higher risk of inactivity, as the possibilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities are almost none. On the other hand, we can witness a clear pattern of association in between not living in a segregated community or camp and having access to utilities and housing conditions that meet the needs of the interviewed women.

We also analyzed patterns of association in between experiences of being denied their right to renting or buying a house (as it was acknowledged as a common experience among Roma women in all three countries), current quality of housing conditions and different personal and community features that could be a proxy for Roma identity: color, educational level, living in a segregated community. Figure below helps us to understand and evidence different factors increasing the risk of having experiences of being denied renting or buying a house.

Roma women belonging to segregated communities (including camps) are living more probably in houses that do not meet their needs and have no education. So, in segregated communities disadvantaged are cumulative, the lack of access to infrastructure, poor housing and lack of education hampering in fact any opportunities for Roma women to break the circle of disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion.

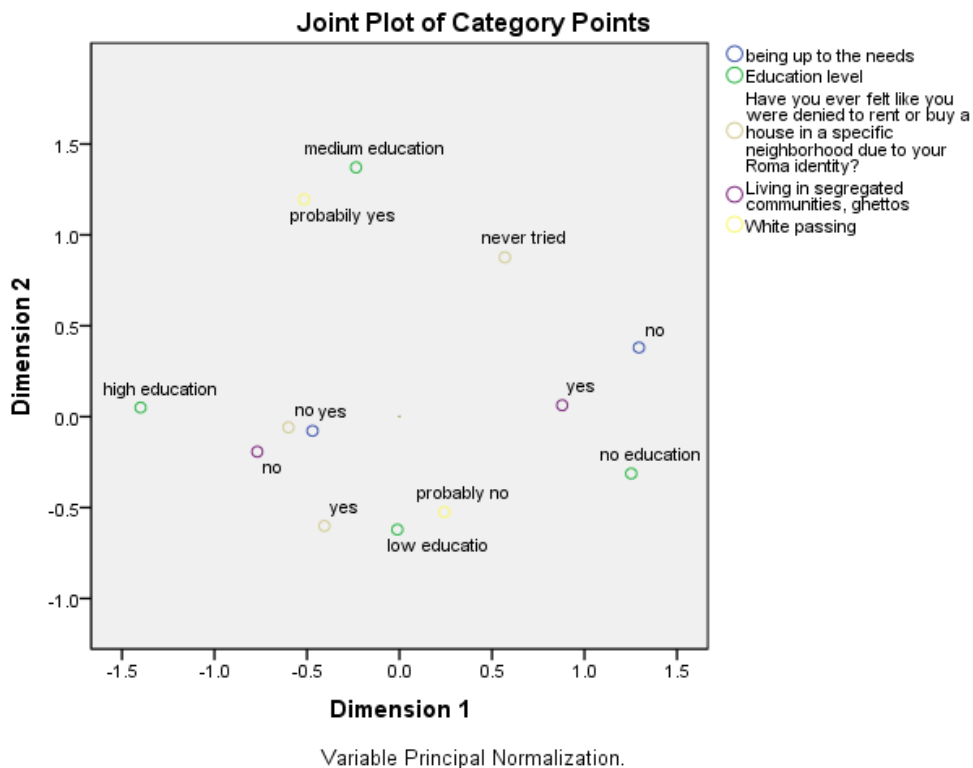
Also, another pattern of association can be observed in between having darker skin, low levels of education and experiences of being denied their right to renting or buying a house.

Roma women never having experiences of being denied their right to rent or buy a house are more probable to be found living in gadje neighborhoods / communities and also having houses

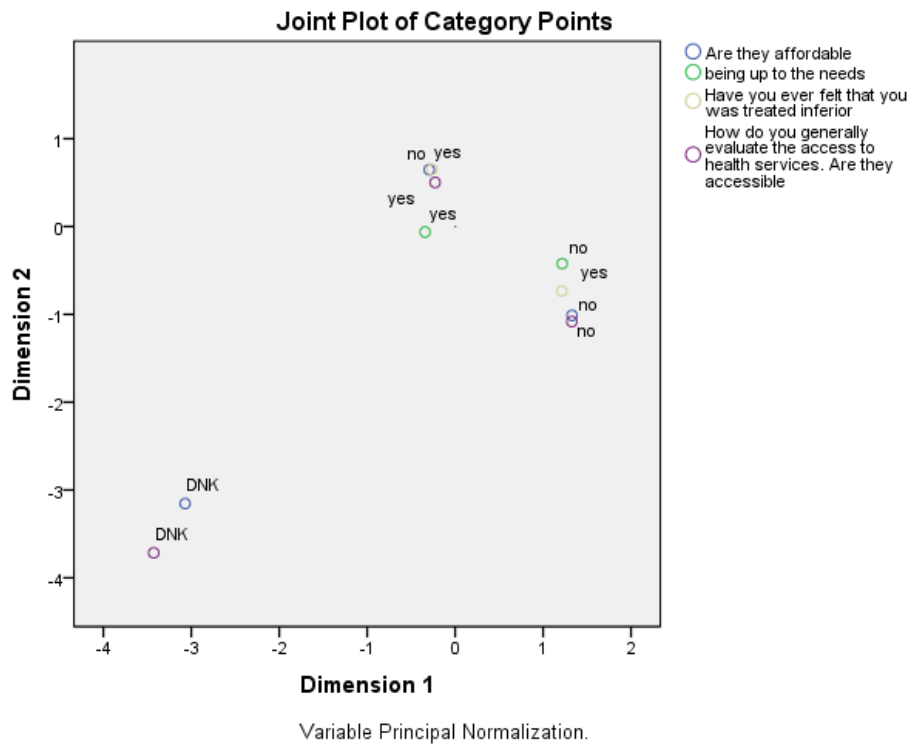
up to their needs. In fact, the figure below emphasizes the existence of two worlds: the gadje world with access to adequate housing and the Roma world (communities) with access to poor housing conditions.

Living in houses that do not meet basic needs is also associated with poor access to health services and to lack of affordable health services. Also, it is more probable for Roma women coming from poor neighborhoods to be treated with less respect when accessing the health services. Housing conditions can be considered as a proxy for social class, so ethnicity and social class influence the access to affordable health services.

**Figure 2. Correspondence analyses between the housing conditions and access to renting or buying adequate houses**



**Figure 3. Correspondence analyses between the housing conditions, access to health services and perceived discrimination when accessing health services**

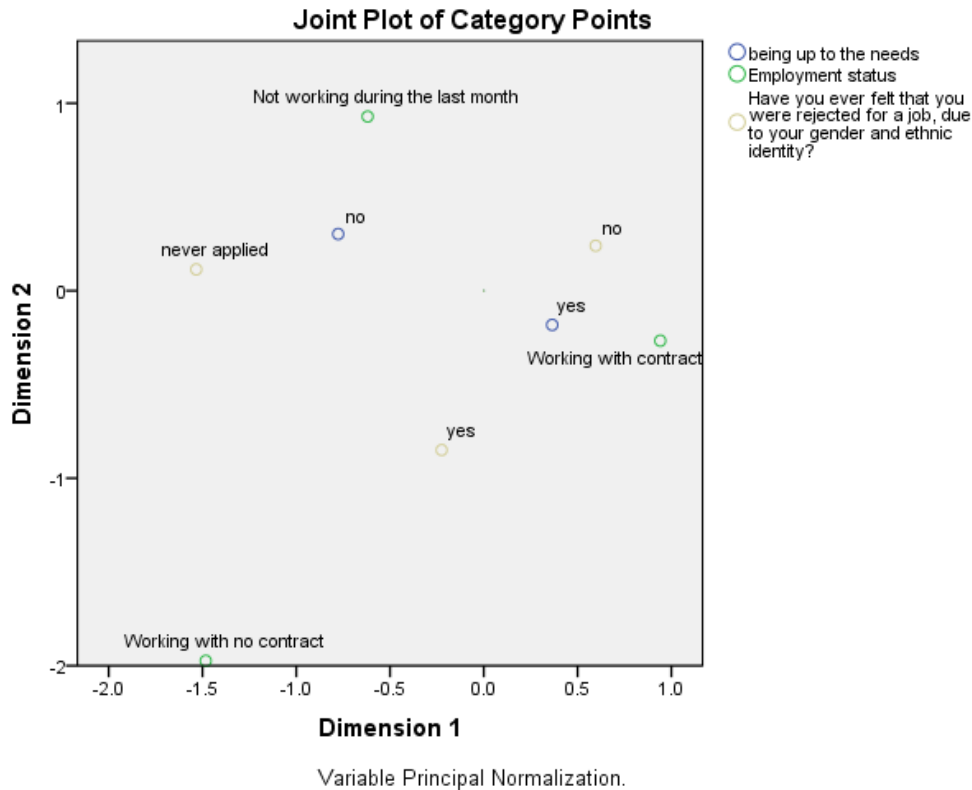


Similarly, we analyzed patterns of association between housing conditions and access to the labor market. Roma women working under a contract have no experiences of discrimination in accessing labor market, and also have adequate housing conditions. On the other hand, Roma women living in poor neighborhoods and having poor housing conditions have no job and also never applied for one.

Analyses run below evidence how disadvantages cumulate: having no adequate housing reduces the probability of leaving a poor community, hampers access to the healthcare system and also leads to life-long inactivity. Roma women having no adequate housing is more probable to have no or low education and to have a darker skin.



**Figure 4. Correspondence analyses between the housing conditions and access to the labor market**



## Conclusions

As previously said, house deprivation is one of the biggest challenges that Roma women face in their lifetime and one of the main reasons for migrating. It affects both their private lives, their relations and time and also their connection with the public sphere in terms of access to education, labor market or healthcare services and in general contributes to an insecure environment that they live in. Housing situation refers in our chapter from responsibilities they deal with within the household, cleaning, organizing a cozy space with little resources, to relations developed with family members and neighbors. In migration situations their motherhood is



severely damaged as the connection with their children breaks, their health care is damaged when living in improvised camps (as in Italy), sleeping in night shelters (as in Finland) or neighborhoods without adequate investments from the state (as in Romanian case). Most of the respondents live in segregated places or Roma neighborhoods, overcrowded houses, in camps, such as in the case of Italy and Romania. In Finland, most of the respondents are circular migrants, living mostly on the streets and sleeping in night shelters and therefore such correlations were not possible.

When living in informal settlements, their housing condition is of low quality, constructed with improper materials, property situation could be undocumented, unclear, without connection to basic infrastructure and utilities (sewage, water, electricity, public transport or roads).

There is a high probability of exclusion and marginalization when the lack of access to facilities needed is present. Also, their inactivity on the labor market or access to education are affected and influenced. There are clear associations made within this chapter (please see Figure 1) between living standards in Roma segregated settlements with poor access to infrastructure, on the one hand, and living conditions in neighborhoods populated by non-Roma people, on the other hand.

Experiences of discrimination and humiliations occur because of their ethnicity, residence, social status and gender identity. Respondents who have a permanent job admitted that they hide their residence place and even in school they hid coming from a Roma camp. When renting or buying a house, discrimination occurs more often and are were clearly evidenced by women narratives. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and motherhood deepens the problems, increasing prices for renting or by simply but cruel refusals. For white passing Roma situations appear less, being more trusted as renters, but still they have to deal with stereotypes from their property owners.

Few respondents also mentioned political environments in countries such as Finland and Italy where different far right movements and anti LGBT+ groups increased the unsafe situation of women. Roma lesbians and transgender women are among the most exposed to hate threats.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



The last part of our chapter addresses the social housing situation and thus our aim was not to compare the three country's systems; we acknowledge that national politics influence the needs of the most vulnerable groups, increasing or decreasing access to a social house. Even in situations such as Finland and Italy which have higher rates of available social housing compared with Romania, having a migrant status makes it very difficult to access one.

So even when European countries have extended programs of social housing or renting at a reduced price or fee, the immigration status in fact blocks the access of Roma women to social housing. Most of our respondents in Romania never applied for a social house or if they did, the waiting time is between 3 to 10 year. Motives may vary from not knowing that they have the right, high bureaucracy, ineligibility, inexistence of social house stock to immigrant status.

As long as the system is not adapted for the needs of the most vulnerable groups and insists on establishing eligibility criteria and standards proper for people with more advantages in life, Roma women and LGBT+ will not have access to proper housing.



## 5. ROMA GIRLS AND WOMEN IN EDUCATION

Experiences of discrimination in the area education were collected and presented through the eyes of Roma girls and teenagers, as pupils and students, but also through the eyes of Roma women as mothers and grandmothers, revealing how the public education services evolved towards inclusiveness over the years.

In order to understand the experiences collected, one has to consider the fact that oftentimes, Roma girls have access to education of lower quality, as compared to the majority of pupils, both boys and girls. Finland is the exception (at European and international level) with respect to assuring equal access to quality education to all pupils, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Also, the experiences of Roma girls and women have to be approached through an intersectional lens. In the case of Roma girls there is at least an intersection between age and ethnicity, while in the case of Roma women there are intersections in between motherhood (with different cultural norms regarding child rearing and the role of school achievements) and ethnicity, other dimensions being added according to the specific conditions of each Roma woman interviewed.

Even if not named or identified as ethnic discrimination, the myriad of dimensions such as neighborhood, poverty, level of education, number of children/sisters/brothers, etc. are pointing to the structural inequalities that hamper Roma girls and women to access different social services, including education.

Following education and acquiring a minimum of basic skills is the base for accessing other social and political rights, and, nevertheless, the criteria for preventing lifelong discrimination in accessing jobs and benefiting in the long run from different social security services and benefits. On the long run, the level of basic reading and comprehension skills also impacts Roma women's



access to the health system and the quality of services received. This is maybe why education is one of the areas where ethnic discrimination is perceived as such, while in the other spaces (health or labor market), dimensions such as having a certain level of education or belonging to a certain neighborhood (proxy for poverty), seem to be much more acknowledged.

Roma girls' experiences in education are sometimes only a "reproduction" of Roma women's position and experiences in society, mixed with feelings of invisibility, inferiority, and being considered less capable or honest than their gadje peers.

Considering the limits in data collection, in order to better understand how discrimination happens in the education system in a specific context, some of the educational experiences of the immigrant Roma women in Italy and Finland were excluded from the analysis. Experiences of Roma women from Finland are underrepresented, as the number of interviews carried out among native Roma women from this country is very low.

### [Cultural norms with respect to education](#)

As we previously saw, the first interaction with school was a negative experience for most women participants in the research, being labeled through an ethnic key and bullied. For women, the experiences of differential treatment are linked with their families' experiences of perpetuated exclusion and traumas. Values put in education are coupled with negative treatments and gender norms imposed to women. Therefore, as stated by women respondents, within their families, Roma girls are socialized and educated mainly to have family responsibilities, to become wives and mothers. Education is considered important mainly in relation to the roles prescribed to women by their families, and by the majority of society. Although family expectations with respect to educational achievements for girls in many situations are low or non-existent, they are in antithesis with what women themselves perceive as the role of education for developing life skills or for having a job. As a consequence, most of the women interviewed have a higher educational level,



as compared to their parents, demonstrating the need to break educational patterns perpetuated within the family.

Given that Roma families are diverse in terms of kinship, socio-economic background, religion or even citizenship/migration history, values regarding education vary among the Roma women interviewed and their families. In some cases, the education of women is considered important, while other times the perceived role of education for women is limited to acquiring basic general skills, like reading and numeracy. The lack of pressure put by parents on their children also has to be considered in the larger context of discouragement in relation to the potential access to, even the lower and informal segment of, the labor market.

*” My family had no expectations regarding my education. Of course, if I had continued, they would have been happy, but they never forced me. At the camp no parent forced their children to attend school, especially after primary school” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*” I made all my children go to school until eighth grade, it is important to read and write, to be intelligent.” (Interview 10, Italy)*

*” I haven’t felt it because the school has never been a priority for my mother. It was enough for my parents to know how to read, write, and do basic calculations. They said: “it’s enough to know how to read and the multiplication table because it’s not as if you’ll become something important in life” ... Only now did my mother begin to say: “you should finish your school. It’s important to have an education”. In time, she became aware of the importance of school.”*  
*(Interview 3, Romania)*

*“Where would you find a job? Because you go somewhere and they will ask you about your level of education. And if you only completed 8th grade, no one will hire you. You must finish at least the 10th grade, and you have to know how to write well, how to read, and how to talk to people.”*  
*(Interview 13, Romania)*

We also found, to a large extent, a pattern of placing high value on education in order to prepare Roma women for having a job, as the traditional Roma occupation disappeared or are not providing enough for the family needs. Parents and grandparents urge and support Roma girls to



pursue education, in order to avoid a life of poverty, hardships in providing for their children and exclusion. This pattern is rather to be found among single mothers, for whom providing for their children is a very hard task.

*” My family wanted us to go to school and study, which was strange for the community, because among Roma, as I was saying, females usually don’t study. Males can, but not females”*

*(Interview 2, Italy)*

*” ... or for my father I was the special daughter and therefore he was not very strict with me, in fact he even sent me to school, but he also wanted me to get married. It's normal. It's too bad when a woman has no children and no husband. The Roma community wants this: that young people get married and have children. For us, family is the most important thing.” (Interview 10,*

*Italy)*

*”I told her, “You will get married when you are 30, go study, get a job, travel, and have fun seeing the entire world. There is time to get married. I am not like other mothers to be eager to see her as a bride. I am the type who says, “Go study so you can have a nice job, to travel and have fun”.” (Interview 19, Romania)*

In some cases, the value put on family and motherhood creates a tension between” studying” and” marrying”. Some of the women interviewed were raised knowing that pursuing an education and following the community norms are different pathways in life. But in most cases, it is in fact about postponing motherhood until finishing studying and finding a job.

*” In general, males are raised with more freedom, and eventually they could also study. However, in my case, my parents have always wanted me and my sister to study and to realize our dreams: an exception. We have never been under great pressure to get married, in fact we are not married yet.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“Don't get married, don't have children soon, study, grow up”. During my childhood we lived among our community.” (Interview 11, Italy)*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*” My mom didn't let me do anything at home [cleaning, cooking ..., ed.]: I studied and went out with my friends. At the community level, I have never lived in a Roma camp or in a Roma neighborhood.” (Interview 19, Italy)*

*” However, the primary concern of my Roma family was my education. They always told me to go to school, to get married only after going to school and getting a job.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

*” I have seen that school is often, if not always, seen as a thing that belongs to Gadgé. If the ambition is to get married and have children, it is clear that the level of education is not perceived as that important.” (Interview 13, Italy)*

Most of the women interviewed have higher levels of education than their parents, so, a pattern of increased social mobility can be witnessed, despite the persistence of specific cultural norms regarding the importance of family. It is not rare for Roma women to come from families where at least one parent was illiterate. But women, including those interviewed for this study, continue to push forward their children to increase their level of education. The value they attribute to education depends both on the perceived returns on the long run, but also on the larger context (community or nation) where Roma live.

*” As high school, I attended psycho-pedagogical high school. Both my father and my mother wanted me to continue University. Their expectations were that I study. They are not happy at all that I decided to stop.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

*” My parents' expectations were that we all study at University. My community didn't care as much about school as my parents did. In fact, we are the only ones who attended university.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*” Surely, the Roma dwelling in the camps are not so sensitive towards education. However, this does not depend on their culture, but on their housing conditions. It is obvious that, if you live in a camp, everything is more tiring and therefore even education is not so encouraged, precisely because everything becomes more tiring.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

*” I do not want to push them or choose for them, but I want to support them in school and education, to get a proper job and be able to provide for their families in the future. ... When my*





*children are older, I do not want them to think that career equals success. ... What I wish is that they understand that most important is a good heart, everything else comes after that. ... I want to encourage my kids to be happy, not to burn out in this world.” (Interview 17, Finland)*

### Being a pupil – quality of education received

For some of the Roma women interviewed, remembering the days of going to school meant remembering discrimination and being regarded in a negative way because they are Roma or they are different. Memories of going to school were coupled with memories of racist teachers, classmates or other pupils. Ethnic discrimination blends with discrimination of migrants, of those with challenging socio-economic backgrounds or with a different sexual orientation and can be found in the narratives of Roma women from all three countries. The experiences of racism and harassment presented by Roma women have a different weight in their stories, those coming from teachers being more traumatic and harmful.

*” I remember the physics teacher, who was quite racist too. There were many gypsies from the camp in that middle school, and everyone still remembers that physics teacher, they remember that he was a racist” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“I remember a teacher who was mean to me, she was racist. Sometimes she treated me really badly, she told me "you're a gypsy, that's why you don't do your homework".” (Interview 17, Italy)*

*“But there were some poor girls whose mother died. And there were five motherless children. And the neighbor who lived next door to the school had a walnut tree. And she [ed. the teacher] went there to pick up some nuts, and she punished the two sisters by forcing them to kneel on the nutshells, and she hit them with a ruler on their hand. The next day they could no longer write.” (Interview 9, Romania)*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*“When we went to school, we didn’t have too many notebooks. We used to take notes of many courses in one single notebook and the teacher was picking on us because we didn’t have notebooks. I preferred not to go to school.” (Interview 12, Romania)*

*“... you should know that I was the only Roma girl attending school in my village. Sometimes I was afraid. I mean, I felt bad being a gypsy because I was an A student. I was very good at Physics and Chemistry. The teachers were happy and satisfied with my school performance, but when they said to me „that gypsy got an A”, I felt as if I was nothing, even though...” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*” As much as you would study, as a gypsy pupil, they still didn’t see you working, struggling.” (Interview 16, Romania)*

*“I was little, and it was the birthday of a child. He brought candies, as it is the custom, and he gave them to the teacher so the teacher can give candies to the children. And the teacher told me, “I will not give you because you are a gypsy”, not that I asked for it, she gave candies to all the children, and she saw me and told me, “I will not give you because you are a gypsy”.” (Interview 19, Romania)*

*” Schooling years were decent, I had a lot of support from my family, and most teachers behaved well, as well. Sometimes there was some surprise among the teachers, when I was able to do well in school and get good grades. That felt a bit disrespectful.” (Interview 18, Finland)*

*” I could notice the differential treatment, if someone celebrated their birthday, they would bring a box of candies and share it with everyone. Well, if someone brought candies, they would not give me, they would leave me out, and it was very embarrassing, you know, as a small kid, I didn’t understand what this was all about. The teacher would pretend she did not notice, but it was affecting me, I felt like crying, but I would not cry because a candy for a kid means a lot, my sister.” (Interview 2, Romania)*

Beside the trauma of finding that they are considered “less” than other classmates, other situations of receiving education of lower quality and different treatments prompted up: attention received from teachers, assessments and marks, as well as negative treatment during extra-



curricular activities (which Roma girls were rarely able to take part in, due to their socio-economic hardships).

Even if all memories about school are mixed with positive ones, the teachers` behavior contributed to the perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes about Roma: not having “good” parents, not liking school, being less clean, stealing etc. White passing Roma girls and women experienced discrimination in education less often or of lower intensity. The experiences of being ignored or treated with less respect and attention are mixed, as we could see below, keeping in mind the socio-economic conditions linked with poverty and social exclusion.

*” Certainly. I was seen as the gypsy of the camp, so no teacher was interested in me. Nobody made sure that I understood the explanations, for example.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*” Even the teachers discriminated against me, they treated me badly. If I asked for some explanation, they told me that first I had to think about learning the language [immigrant, ed.], and then the other things. ... They used to give me low marks and they used to tell me that those marks were enough for me [because I was "the gypsy", ed.]” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*“In some cases, then, if a Roma child had not done his/her homework, the fact was considered very serious. If, on the other hand, a Gadgé child didn't do his homework, it wasn't a problem.”  
(Interview 2, Italy)*

*” I think the girls were sitting in the front benches, and the boys in the back. It didn` t matter, but I felt differences in the way the teachers delivered the information. I realize it now, looking back with maturity, but then I didn` t. I felt something, but I didn` t know what. Teachers always sat in front of the Romanian girls. I was always the only Roma girl who was called out at the blackboard by the Romanian language teacher because he liked me, he knew I had potential, ...”  
(Interview 1, Romania)*

*” I have had problems with my children's teachers here in Italy. My daughter for example, who is 8 years old, still doesn't know the letters. Thus, you as a teacher, how do you treat her? How do you teach her things? Moreover, the girl told me that if she tells the teacher that other*



*children make fun of her, the teacher doesn't say or do anything. In fact, I want to change her school. (Interview 16, Italy)*

Poverty limits the access of Roma girls to extra-curricular activities, such as school trips. The experiences selected are coming only from Italy, but this has to be understood in the larger context, as being less probable for Roma girls in Romania to have access to such activities in their schooling years.

*"I was in eighth grade and, during the school trip, I felt discriminated against when we had to decide who had to sleep with who in the bedrooms. Even my best friend, who was a Roma but hid her identity, didn't want to sleep in the room with me. I identify myself as a brown woman."*

*(Interview 18, Italy)*

*"When there were trips out of town organized by the school, my mother didn't want to pay, so I couldn't go, but this teacher used to pay for me, so that I could go. And also, during middle school, teachers used to pay for my trips, if I had the pleasure of going there. They used to tell me: "No problem, we'll pay for it"."* (Interview 20, Italy)

## Discouragement in education

A particular type of discrimination experienced by Roma girls in education is linked with discouragement in following school, or a different type or profile of education. When received career advice, Roma girls were directed towards vocational education, or discouraged from continuing their education up to university level, even when they had high achievements. Intersection with gender could be seen in some cases underneath the tracking of Roma women to gendered occupations. When the level of education increases, for instance after surpassing the compulsory one, it is more probable to find experiences of discouragement mixed with those of encouragement and support.



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



This type of discouragement is often not perceived or like a form of discrimination and is more pervasive, as teachers advising pupils in their careers are supposed to do their jobs in the pupils` interest and without using stereotypes. Even more, the impact of such guidance on the entire life course of a pupil could be enormous, as we can see bellow: some of the Roma girls and adolescents decided not to follow their dreams or skills and competences, or even delayed their transition to a higher level of education.

*” But there was one who was really racist: she treated me badly and treated all Roma badly...That teacher [the racist one, ed.] said that for Roma was useless going to school, that school was not for them.” (Interview 6, Italy)*

*“In middle school, what I remember is that I was recommended to attend a vocational school, because the idea was that I did not have the skills to do anything else. I actually went to a vocational school but then I got to the doctorate. The teacher who advised me on the professional institute met me after I graduated from University and I appeared in an article in the newspaper entitled "First nomad graduated from University". She told me: "I would never have said that".” (Interview 11, Italy)*

*“It happened to me with an educator who was engaged in the job placement of young Roma. I told this person that I wanted to go to University but she told me to think of something more practical. I was 17-18 years old. I remember getting very angry, I treated her badly.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

*” In the 11th grade, by my Romanian teacher, after asking "what do you want to become when you grow up?" All my life I wanted to fulfill my grandfather's curse, to get to the Law School. I had prepared for that. I was already studying Economics in the 11th grade, but the teacher told me: “I don` t think you` ll have a chance, since I, as a teacher barely handle having my daughter in Law School, how could you? It`s difficult. Let`s say you` ll get there and finish law school, but do you know what taking the bar exam is like? Do you know how hard you get in? Will you find a law firm? Who is going to help you? And I didn` t realize it because I used to consider that people have my best interests at heart ...” (Interview 1, Romania)*



*” I wanted to go to a Philology high-school, but the geography teacher told me that I should go to the Agriculture high school and specialize in Accounting profile, because the Agriculture high school is not as competitive as the other one. So, I should better go to this one. If I go to the other high school, I might not be able to handle it. And I followed her advice. To be honest, I don't think she had bad intentions but the fact that I never used accounting affected me. After that, I went to college, Philology specialization, because I wanted to study philology.” (Interview 20, Romania)*

*” This also brings into my mind the fact that Roma children are not encouraged in school in general: when they reflect about what profession to choose, the teachers always suggest the ones with the lowest education and least challenges. That is so wrong. Our children are individuals, they have the right to become doctors and teachers, if they wish. I do not mean everyone has to be highly educated, I respect all fields of work, but the opportunities should be equal.... I have not been told straight forward to my face that I would not be able to do something, but there has been this hesitation when I have told them about my dreams or goals.” (Interview 18, Finland)*

### [Access to social support in education](#)

Irrespective of educational cycle, only a minority of Roma girls received financial support to continue their education (public or private scholarships). Most of the respondents left education too soon, while others were not aware of existing facilities as such. In fact, for instance in Romania such programs were introduced only recently. The access to social support has to be addressed in the larger context of equal access to education, keeping in mind that inequality in the educational system in Romania is the highest among countries covered in the PISA survey, while in Finland is the lowest (OECD, 2019). While the redistribution mechanism and the institutional organization of education systems differ a lot from country to country, Romania has the most pressing needs for in kind and financial support (among the analyzed countries).



But the access to social support, even when it is available on paper, is low, as the information is less accessible to parents with no or low education or the legal procedures are sometimes hard to meet. The bureaucracy of accessing the social support and the existing racism discourage pupils and their families from accessing it.

*“I had 2 scholarships, a public one and one from Open Society Foundation. I was well informed.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*” They let me struggle, damn them! I realize why - because my situation was unclear with my divorced parents. What could my grandmother give me from her pension? My father had a salary and because of that, I didn’t meet the eligibility requirements. And because I was in my father’s care, not my grandmother’s. ... Do you know what scholarship I had? (she says proudly) A merit scholarship in the 11th and 12th grade.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

*“Since she is in high school, I only went once to school, when I asked for a student certificate, because the secretary lied that she submitted the documents for the scholarship, but she didn’t. And I went there to get the certificate. And that woman made me angry because she asked me: “Do you want money?” And I told her: “Watch your language, lady because it is her right! Does she go to high-school? Yes. Did she come to school? Yes. Is she in the 12th grade? Yes. So how can you offend me by telling me I want money? Did I come to ask for your salary?”” (Interview 9, Romania)*

*“I remember receiving clothes, food. There were no scholarships before, we’ve only received humanitarian aid. Yes, I enjoyed receiving some beautiful sweaters. I remember I loved those sweaters I received...And I remember my father going with the cart to take food and clothes.” (Interview 14, Romania)*

*” I always had to bring the court decision stating that I was in my father’s custody - who was never there to sign the papers [ed. father was working abroad]. And there was a time when I didn’t get a scholarship. When he was at home, I would quickly take him to the notary’s office to sign the papers so I could get a scholarship.” (Interview 20, Romania)*





## School as an unsafe space

Almost half of the respondents defined school as an unsafe space. Discrimination was coupled with harassment and violence, from both teachers, classmates and other pupils. Ethnic discrimination intersects with socio-economic background (including neighborhood inhabited mostly by Roma or camps for immigrants) in increasing the incidence and severity of harassment and bullying. Racism and classism intersect in the experiences selected out of the Roma women narratives.

Racism coming from classmates and other pupils are in fact more often remembered by Roma women during discussions as against racism coming from the teachers. But racism among teachers acts, in fact, like a catalyst for racism among classmates and pupils. The majority of Roma women remembering racism among teachers also remember acts of bullying among classmates and pupils.

*“I remember a teacher who made us, Roma children, take off our shoes and socks to check if our feet were clean ... Sometimes, teachers used to beat us - Roma children - on the hands. ... I have been bullied at school, multiple times. For example, when I went to the bathroom and got in line, the other children would pass me because "the gypsy can wait" or, as I told you before, they used to look at me and laugh.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“I was bullied, the other children even beat me. I thought about leaving school but thanks to my family I didn't. My family always told me that studying is very important. At school they used to call me "gypsy", they used to pull my hair. One day, they punched and kicked me and I went back home with blood.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*” If I went to the boys’ bathroom, they would ask me what I am doing there. If I would use the girl’s bathroom, the same. Where the hell should I go? And I experienced very big problems during sport class because the teacher was a notorious misogynist and he wanted me to play football like Hagi, but I had nothing to do with football.” (Interview 2, Romania)*





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*“...at the end of the class, this mom told me, “Did your daughter tell you that the Principal hit her?” He hit her in the mouth. He broke her lip, causing her to bleed. (...) And my daughter didn’t want to tell me anything because she was afraid. She said, “Mom, I thought I was to blame.” I went back home, and I asked her what she did at school, and she told me, “look, mom, there was a boy in the classroom who picked on me, he called me names, he called me a crow.” And I said, “Ok, if he told you so, why didn’t you tell the Principal? “I told him, mom, but he picked on me too, he hit me and broke my lip.” (Interview 13, Romania)*

*” Many times I’ve had problems with Romanian boys and girls. They treated me badly, “you are a gypsy! So, what if the teachers praise you? We know that you are a gypsy!” I remember one winter, I almost lost my eyesight because of a Romanian girl, whose mother was a nurse. She was so jealous of me because I was doing well in school. She got the wrong impression that the teachers were giving me the grades I didn’t deserve and that I am not smart. So, she put a boulder into a snowball and hit me in the eye. She did it out of spite because I did well in school, and she doesn’t receive congratulations and encouragement from teachers.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*” I remember feeling different from others at middle school, so between the ages of 10-15. I was bullied at school all day, every day for 5 years, so I was made aware of my difference, other children taught me that. I did not get any kind of support in that situation; the kids were allowed to continue teasing and bullying me. ... At home I would ask what it means that I am called a “gypsy” at school – and that was the time when the word Roma was not yet used in Finland, there was only the word gipsy -, and then my family tried to explain to me – but by then I had already been made to understand I was somehow wrong, there was something wrong about me, by the other children.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

As already discussed, days at school, sometimes the first days at school are the first moments when a Roma girl finds out that there is something “wrong” with having a Roma identity. The feeling of being different in a negative way could be hidden behind sights, small comments, but also behind teachers` recommendations of how to change or behave. But what is common to



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

the experiences depicted below is that school was the space where Roma girls found out that it was not safe to belong to the Roma community.

*"... it happens that three girls from my classroom stop me and ask me: "... but your surname ... are you a gypsy? "At that point I say: "Yes, I'm a gypsy". Since then, I have decided not to hide my Roma identity anymore. The people at school couldn't stand me very much. I was considered a "loser" ". (Interview 9, Italy)*

*" I became aware of the fact I am a Roma when I left my community to go to high-school. I swear to you! I realized it when my headmistress came to me and said that I have a certain accent and I have to get rid of that accent. ... No, but since that episode with my headmistress, I haven't spoken Romanes. I haven't had an accent since then because I haven't spoken Romanes with anyone for 4 years. I spoke Romanes only when I went home, and when my grandmother no longer felt the accent, she started speaking to me in Romanian. And now I speak Romanes and I am answered in Romanian." (Interview 1, Romania)*

*" In school, some children would pick on my girlfriends. I would defend them. They were also Roma, but they were more different, and I would fight with Romanians for them. And they used to say to me: "Why are you meddling? You are not a gypsy!" "But how do you know I'm not a gypsy too?" I dared to oppose them and talked to them on an equal footing because we were more well-groomed." (Interview 17, Romania)*

*" I do not remember a specific situation when I realized my Roma identity, but I think it must have "hit me" during my teenager years, in school. And that was when I started to wear a small version of the Roma dress – these days I wear the "full dress" - and also in other ways express my Roma identity. Obviously, the identity was strengthened when I was surrounded by the majority community. That was when I saw that I am not like others." (Interview 18, Finland)*

Even when asked about the importance of school for their children, Roma women pointed out to racism still present in school and to being treated with less respect and importance in society.



*“I think children are safe in school. Teachers do not have to beat them but, if they do, it is not so serious as to not send them anymore. The important thing is to tell the teachers not to beat them.” (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“I believe that school is a safe place and that Roma should go to school, because even if you are bullied, school is important.” (Interview 20, Italy)*

Respondents even developed strategies to cope with racism and discrimination, considering that facing discrimination could make one stronger. There are also Roma women who remember discrimination and racism, but consider them to be less important in comparison with the purpose of acquiring education and pursuing certification.

*“I think there may be racism in school but if you are a victim of racism you grow stronger. Not much can be done, you can get angry with the teachers but children must go to school anyway.” (Interview 6, Italy)*

*I can say that school is not a safe place for Roma children, because racism and bullying towards Roma is high... in some schools, they even used to shower Roma children when they arrived in the morning. (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“... there were colleagues who boosted my self-confidence. When they called me a gypsy, my ambition increased even more because I wanted to show them that even if I am a gypsy, I can learn and get good grades.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

As in Italy there is a rather good school transportation service, the way to school is not an issue for the girls’ safety. But in the Romanian case, the lack of public-school transportation opens the road for specific harassment and unsafety both within and outside the community.

*“... it happened to me, but not in school. I was harassed by a boy from my community. He was a traditional Roma belonging to the spoitori group. He liked me. What do you think he used to do? In the morning, when I went to school, he was behind me, accompanying me to school. He walked past me without saying a word. He was waiting for me either in the school yard or outside. When I returned home from school, he would come back with me. At one point, he tried to make advances at me, to take my hand, to hold me in his arms, to walk beside me, to say that*



*he likes me and that he wants to be my boyfriend. I was in the 8th grade ... But after a while, I told my mother: "look, this boy takes me to school and takes me back from school." And my mother came outside with a broomstick and chased him all the way." (Interview 3, Romania)*

## School as a safe place

Although in a few occasions school is sketched as a safe place by Roma women respondents, these positive memories point to the importance of improving knowledge among Roma teachers with respect to Roma diversity and Roma history, culture and traditions. Also, they point out the importance of treating the historical trauma of being Roma with adequate respect and importance in history.

*"However, when my teachers discovered that I was Roma, because I told them, the relationship became even more beautiful. I told them that I was a Roma when we went to Birkenau, on the memory train. I absolutely wanted to go, so they took me. When I got to the concentration camp, I felt a knot in my stomach, I felt very shaken. (...) Seeing me cry in such a loud, heartfelt way, the teachers began talking to me and I then told them: "I am Roma". I remember they started crying too. We were all crying." (Interview 9, Italy)*

*"As happened to me, my son as well discovered the meaning of the word "gypsy" in elementary school. ... (...) He told me that the teacher replied that it is not a bad word. But he insisted. When I saw the notebook that said "gypsy", I was in tears: I didn't know whether to cry or get angry. It's frustrating: is it possible that things never change? The next day I went to school and the teacher immediately came up to me and said: "I didn't know you were Roma, sorry". The teacher apologized and made me understand that there was no bad faith in her behavior, but just an absence of knowledge." (Interview 11, Italy)*

*"I think you have to go to school. At least until high school, you have to go. School is a good environment, it is. Of course, it depends on the teachers, but I think that if you have teachers who*



*believe in you, who follow you, then even if you have shitty classmates, you still go to school: as it happened to me.” (Interview 9, Italy)*

## Racism and dropping out school

Causes of school dropout are mixed and extensively analyzed by other papers and studies in the field. As expected, interviews are pointing extensively to poverty and low quality of the education received, as well as to the lack of family support or to family divorces as the main causes for dropping out.

Racism in school takes obvious forms of different treatment, but also more perverse and subtle forms of constantly having to prove that you are not the same as the community you are coming from.

*“So, what if I am a gypsy? I wanted to show them that a gypsy is never stupid, that a gypsy, after all, can study. I had a technological education teacher, and when she opened the catalog, she saw that I have only good grades and looked at me, she realized I am a gypsy, and told me, “Come to the blackboard to see if you do as well as the catalog indicated”, and when she saw I do well, she was surprised. “ (Interview 13, Romania)*

*“I was discouraged by my math teacher from primary school because I didn’t like math one bit (...) And I said, “I don’t like it, it is enough for me if I pass, I am okay, it is safe for me”. And then he said, “You, in your community, anyhow, after the 8th grade, get married, you don’t need high school, you need nothing else”, and I said, “Well, you will see that I will not get married, I don’t plan on it, at least not now” and he said, “All the girls from your community get married”. (Interview 10, Romania)*

But racism may lead, like in some of the collected narratives, coupled with a lack of trust, discouragement and even harassment and violence, to dropout education. There can be a series of events which lead to discouragement, which is why women don’t necessarily point out one specific



event. As such, it became very difficult to explain dropping out by using just one motive, but a series of events, experiences and circumstances leading to it.

*“Certainly, the fact that I was not [ed. feeling] well in school led me to no longer want to go there, it's normal. In fact, even though I enjoyed studying, I stopped studying, precisely because I didn't like going to school.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“Then there is also the phenomenon of Roma children who, being bullied so much, lose the desire to go to school... most of them get tired and the reasoning is: "They don't want me at school, I don't go to school". And for the schools it is better this way, better that the Roma are not there, so they have one less problem. “(Interview 13, Italy)*

*“I told you, I didn't go to school anymore not because they called me “a gypsy”, but because I got used to housework.” (Interview 9, Romania)*

*“A bad memory was that I felt marginalized. I didn't have the strength to go forward. Because I said to myself that no matter how much I would study, If I am being mocked and labeled as a gypsy all the time, why should I keep going to school among Romanians? It's better to mind my own business, and that's it! A woman ends up being a housewife anyway. That's what I thought back then. Now I am sorry I wasn't optimistic; I am sorry I wasn't a fighter.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*” I don't know, maybe it is because... now that I am older, I realize that some children start hating school, the teachers because... Look what happened to my sister-in-law's child, he hates school so much because they call him a gypsy, they make fun of him. I believe this is the reason I didn't like it.” (Interview 19, Romania)*

## Going back to school

Some of the interviewed women expressed their wish of going back to school. In Romania for instance, following a “second chance” program is possible for adults who left education early,



to re-enroll and finish their compulsory education or even to obtain a qualification. But the courses' timeline is sometimes not supporting the Roma women' dreams of finishing education.

*"I only finished the 8th grade because my parents considered that it's enough. It was important for them to pass the capacity exam. If I passed this exam, it would be enough. After I got married, I signed up for open learning classes, and they [the parents] were not against it. (...) I didn't want to end up having completed only the 8th grade. And my father also agreed. He thought it was safe since I didn't go to school every day and spend fewer hours at school."*

*(Interview 3, Romania)*

A very separate case is that of immigrant Roma women in Finland who aims to finish education in Finland. Also, some of the Roma women without education, are enrolled in some "integration" or Finnish courses.

*"[ed. about integration courses] we learn to count, we learn the colors, we learn the days of the week from Monday to Sunday, to say um maanantai, sunnuntai, and so on, Finnish language and so on. A course for foreigners to learn. This school is education for foreigners who are illiterate, who don't know the language. I've been going there for one month. Today it's one month since I started going. I feel amazing. I feel anew. I feel happy."* (Interview 7, Finland)

### Being a mother or grandmother of a pupil

Norms relating to the importance of education within Roma communities changed throughout generations, according to women perceptions, but also supported by their constantly increasing level of education. Roma women are urging their children to follow education and point to them the importance of education in finding a job. The responsibility to care of the children's education falls on women, and so does the pressure coming from teachers to continue to support and encourage their children to pursue higher levels.





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Being aware that without education the informal jobs and daily works usually available to them are not providing enough resources for covering the family needs, they highlight the importance of education, also for Roma girls. Another important aspect mentioned by women is related to their traumas experienced by racism in school and through their entire life. Therefore, there is an increased understanding that pursuing education will bring more strength to their children to counteract racist attitudes in relation with non-Roma, but also increase the social status of the family.

*“Yes, I would have liked it [ed. going to school]. Of course, it is hard for me. I take this paper in my hand, and I don’t know what it says. And if I receive a paper, and I go to someone, maybe I get tricked. (...). How do I know what is written on that paper? I only sign it. Such situations happened, and I regret, I truly regret that I didn’t go to school. I am proud of my girl because she went to school. You know, I’ve also said to her, “Don’t go!”, and later, “Go to school!”.”*

*(Interview 8, Romania)*

*“My father and mother always told us that school is important. They wanted us to have a good job. Roma women are capable of being both housewives and workers.” (Interview 3, Italy,)*

*“It is a different mentality. Before, if someone offended you, if they called you a gypsy, you would come home crying and refusing to go out, you wouldn’t even go out on the street. I see differently - if they continue to go to school, it means that they have a different mentality, a different way of thinking. I’ll give an example: sooner or later, the girl gets married and will no longer suffer and endure humiliation as the gypsy women used to.” (Interview 9, Romania)*

*” The poor teachers talk to me: “Hey, you finished the 10th grade. Why don’t you send your children to school?” The blame falls on me. And they don’t believe me that I have such a bad experience and this sorrow as a mother because I realize that my kids don’t want to go to school.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

Emancipatory values with respect to the importance of education for Roma women coexist with more traditional ones, which put more focus on their roles as housewives and mothers.





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Roma women more often teach their children to denounce discrimination, to talk about it and to fight back, including discrimination in education, and to not let racism lower their life expectations. The Roma women interviewed generally perceive that attitudes in education have not changed too much from their years of schooling until now, but they still have hope for a better and less racist education.

*” Maybe a couple of teachers were bad and a few children, but these are normal things, they happen. When it happened that my children told me that sometimes a teacher or some child had been bad, I told them to get angry, to defend themselves and I told them that they had to put up with these stupid things because the world is also made of this. But they suffered just little discrimination, not much.” (Interview 6, Italy)*

*‘I don't think much has changed, I think there will always be good people and bad people, in schools and in all the other places. I was lucky with my son's school because in all the classes the teachers treated him well. They knew he was a gypsy but they treated him well anyway, they weren't racist.’ (Interview 17, Italy)*

*‘I have always sent my children to school; school is beautiful even if sometimes teachers are bad. Some of my children were beaten by teachers when they were little. I then went to talk to them and the teachers told me that my children were too rude. I got angry; I told the teachers not to beat them anymore. But anyhow, I always sent them to school.’ (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“(..) There is only one teacher for 30 kids. (..) So she focuses on those five, and the rest of the children are all just a filler. There are a lot of things my son didn't know in kindergarten. But as for my son, yes, I felt difference and discrimination. He is discriminated against because is dark-skinned. The teacher doesn't pay him enough attention. That's the system - the teacher focuses on maximum five children. (Interview 3, Romania)*

*“My child had his hair pulled by the teacher in kindergarten. I believed it happened when he was in the middle class. He had longer hair, and he is a bit naughty, and the teacher, in order not to make the child realize that it was a form of aggression, ‘(...) “I like your hair”, and she would brutally pull his hair. (..) One time, two times, three times, until finally, the child came home,*



*and at one point, he dared to tell me, “Mom, the teacher says she likes my hair and does this to my hair”.” (Interview 3, Romania)*

Migrant Roma women in Finland, having their children enrolled in the Finnish educational system are content both with the quality of education received by their children, but also with how they interact with teachers. Also, they say they did not experienced racism in the Finnish educational system so far.

*“...the girl went in Romania but she did not really know how to read, she only knew a bit ... she learned better here than in Romania. Here she knows how to read. And the boy, he did not even go to kindergarten and he also knows how to read” (Interview 15, Finland)*

*“They are top teachers and so sweet that when I go to meetings with them, I feel like I am not even in Finland. It’s like I’m somewhere else. Like, so, they have a vocabulary and a dialect that are so sweet that in those moments I cannot believe how different it is.” (Interview 11, Finland)*

### Patterns of discrimination in education

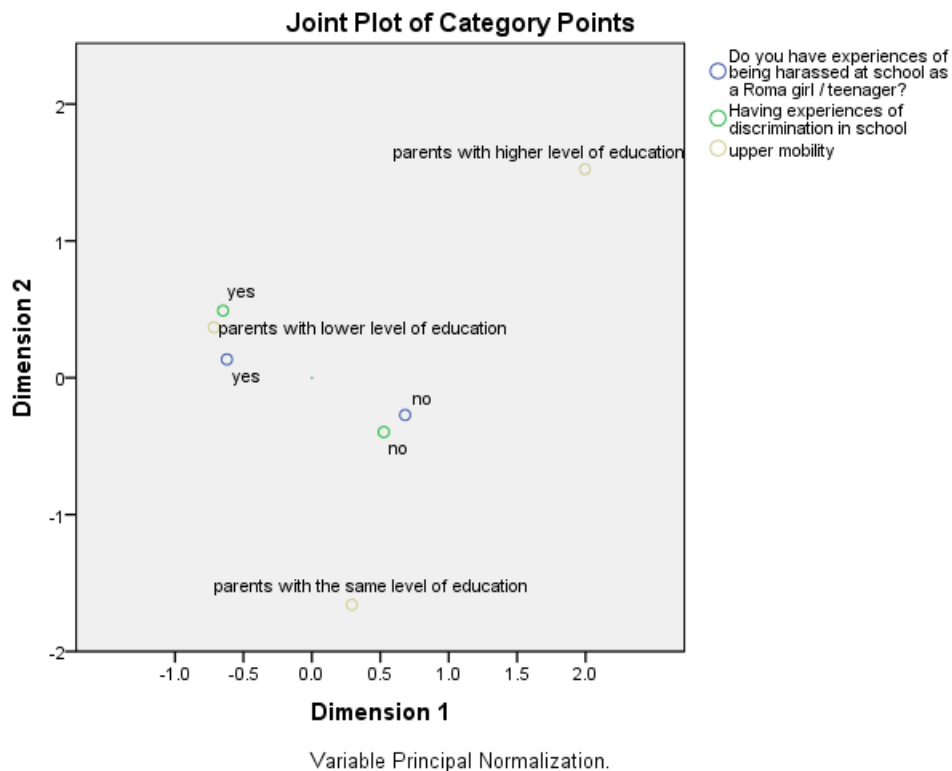
Since the women interviewed attended school in the past, sometimes in a different country from the one where the interview was held, it was not possible to assess their access to education, in relation to different socio-economic dimensions characterizing their family of origin.

In order to evidence the correlation between the socio-economic status of the families and the incidence of discrimination and harassment in schools, we used the index on upper mobility (which compares the respondent’s level of education with the highest level of parents’ education). Even if the index compares two levels of education, considering the interviews carried out, the parents rarely finalized compulsory education or medium education.

As the next figure shows, there are strong patterns of association between experiences of discrimination and harassment. As said before, women themselves named the negative behavior of teachers as discriminatory, while behavior from peers (classmates or other pupils) was labeled

as harassment. So, where discrimination occurs from teachers seen as authority, also harassment also occurs from classmates. Also, both discrimination and harassment are more likely to happen to those with parents with a low level of education, that it is in fact a proxy for low socio-economic backgrounds.

**Figure 5. Correspondence analyses between the incidence of discrimination and harassment and socio-economic background of the families**



## Conclusions

Within the chapter we wanted to listen from Roma women how school was for them in terms of access, treatment, inclusiveness, as a safe space or support system. As seen in the previous chapter, school is in many situations the first interaction with the gadje world and therefore the



memory of that is still vivid to many of them. Overwhelmingly, their first interaction is a negative attitude coming from teachers and classmates. Remembering the days of going to school meant remembering discrimination and finding in a negative way that they are Roma or that they are different. School is not a safe place for most of the Roma girls as in school they found out that being Roma is not good. Color plays an important role here as many of the women who don't identify as white passing claim they were harassed and bullied since the first day of school. In school, ethnic discrimination intersects with the status as migrants, gender, social class (including the residence: neighborhood or camps for immigrants) or with a different sexual orientation.

Teachers play the most important role here and their behavior is remembered by many of respondents as perpetuating ethnic stereotypes about Roma: they don't have good parents, they don't like school, they are not clean, they steal etc This behavior creates an environment perpetuated by classmates. With very few examples, there is no respect for Roma history and culture, no inclusiveness towards Roma pupils and very rarely, respondents mentioned situations where the teachers sanctioned discriminatory attitudes or bullying from classmates. These series of experiences create discouragement in education and most of the time women don't point out to one particular moment. That is why dropping out of school has to be understood as a long series of events where they are discouraged by the educational system. Also, the lack of encouragement from families, as well as the house chores the girls have to perform contributes to dropping out of school. Their own patterns of life long discouragement affect them as well as their lower access to the labor market or only to informal jobs. Coupled with residence (camps or Roma communities), and infrastructure (lack of transportation more common in Romania) the series of discouragements add to the life choices they make later on. But even so, most of the women interviewed have a higher educational level compared with their parents, demonstrating the need to break educational patterns.

There is a strong need for school conciliation as this type of discouragement is less felt like a discrimination and is more pervasive. Teachers advise pupils in their careers, but when it comes to Roma girls they don't give in fact any guidance, using also stereotypes in assessing their prospects in life. Only a small minority of women received financial support to continue school or had access to different opportunities from school due to lack of information, advice, support, low



level of parent's education, bureaucracy in accessing social support and racism. With other words, the lower the level of education of parents, the lower the access to services and the probability to be discriminated against and (self)excluded.

Women have an increased understanding of the necessity of pursuing education but interestingly not to “integrate” within the system but to develop more strength and to counteract racist attitudes. Stories of their children's experience in school are similar to their own stories but this time they react, fight back and teach their children how to better protect and sanction discrimination and bullying.

Therefore, the educational systems are not adapted to those most marginalized and in a series of vulnerabilities given by their intersected categories. Focusing on one dimension, the school system encourages hiding your identities and the beliefs that one has to exceed their own condition as Roma.



## 6. ROMA WOMEN AND ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

The three healthcare systems referred in the report are organized and financed differently and provide services of different quality. Understanding the coverage and the form of organization of three different systems is a must also to understand the differences evidenced by Roma women narratives from Finland, Italy and Romania.

The healthcare system in Italy is a mixed public-private one and provides universal coverage for all citizens and residents, being usually free of charge or implying low additional payments. Similarly, Finland has a health system mainly publicly funded and provides most of its services and treatments free of charge. Services are available to all citizens and permanent residents, but there are studies pointing out the immigrants usually benefit less by healthcare services (Weiste-Paakkanen & all, 2013). “Undocumented” migrants usually have very limited access to healthcare services, mostly to emergency services and to voluntary based organized services (Keshimaki & all, 2014).

On contrary, the Romanian public healthcare system is financed mainly based on contributions, transfers from the public budgetary sources having a lower importance in the system financing. But public healthcare services are also available to all citizens and residents in Romania through emergency services, being provided in public hospitals and irrespective of their contributory status to the system.

Private healthcare services are also available in all countries by contributing to private insurance companies or paying entirely or partially the services received. Their importance is still low, but on an increasing trend.



Finland and Italy are characterized by higher healthcare expenditure relative to GDP, more or less than 9% of GDP (even if Finland scores better), compared with Romania, that is in fact the last among the European countries with only cca. 5%. (Eurostat, 2020a). So, it is expected that the quality of healthcare services is significantly lower in Romania comparing with other countries.

According to Special Eurobarometer 411 (European Commission, 2014), 94% of respondents in Finland declared themselves satisfied with the quality of healthcare services available in their country and only 56% in Italy. But only a minority of Romanian respondents – 25% - representing the lowest share among European countries, evaluate the Romanian healthcare system as “good+”.

As Roma women interviews pointed out, accessing the health system as citizens or active on the formal labor market was in most of the cases not associated with harassment or negative experiences (trans women are an exception). Patterns of discrimination were more obvious for undocumented migrants, transgender women and Roma women inactive on the labor market or working informally, and accessing mostly the emergency medical treatments and services.

Investigating health problems and access to healthcare services among Roma women proved to be quite challenging. The interview guidelines were designed with a gender perspective on women’s health issues, addressing experiences of reproductive health, routine check-ups, taking care of dependents, being pregnant and giving birth. But, for some of the women interviewed, health issues proved to be quite a taboo topic.

*“I’ve never had any problems but in general health is a taboo topic. The topic of health is the one least addressed” (Interview 11, Italy)*

Roma women enjoyed being pregnant and giving birth (even if sometimes in racist environments, as we will point out), enjoyed being mothers and these experiences were very much present during the interviews. This has facilitated the connection and the exchange of information between fieldworkers and Roma women.



In most of the interviews Roma women tend to minimize the health issues they have (even if they are in very vulnerable positions), and to emphasize their good health and their children's good health.

Women's health is also treated as less important by the respondents themselves. They tend to put the wealth and health of their family first place, to take care of the others – husband, parents, children -, while the self-care is rarely addressed.

*“It is difficult for me to take care of my health because I always have too many things to do for my family and so I postpone my needs.” (Interview 16, Italy)*

Women's experiences with health care systems in their countries are largely influenced by the quality of the health-care services available in each country. Comparative studies on EU countries usually place Finnish and Italian healthcare systems among those able to provide high quality services to most of their citizens and residents. On the other hand, Romanian health system is struggling with historical underfinancing, constant reforms, decentralization, shortages of qualified personnel, lower salaries and fails to provide adequate care to all its citizens, with those in vulnerable positions being even more exposed to lack of adequate healthcare. As experiences collected pointed out, racism intersects with low socio-economic background (measured with proxies such as level of education), in shaping the experience of Roma women in accessing healthcare services.

### Accessibility of healthcare services

As expected, most of the Roma women respondents from Italy and Finland consider the healthcare system of their countries to be quite accessible. But, for Roma women from Romania it can be very hard to access the services that exist, at least, on paper. At least in the narratives of Roma women interviewed, the healthcare systems in Finland and Italy succeed to address to a large extent the needs of the most vulnerable citizens of the society, while in Romania things are quite the opposite. The quotes selected point to the extent to which the analyzed healthcare systems





succeed in addressing the needs of the Roma women, often found among the most vulnerable and deprived in each society.

*“Access to health services is affordable enough even for those who do not have many economic possibilities.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“For me, it is relatively good because I work. It is more difficult for my family because they don’t work, and they need insurance, and if you don’t have insurance, you have to pay, and if you have to pay, you don’t have the means, so it is difficult.” (Interview 6, Romania)*

*“Here where we sleep [refers to the night shelter at H., which also serves as a doctors’ and nurses’ reception for people with an irregular immigration status], doctors come there and they wrote me those things [...], and the other week I went to K. [refers to a health center nearby] to visit a doctor, there they wrote me a prescription and told me to go to a social office, where they made me the documents and I got the medicine I need to take.” (Interview 20, Finland)*

Even if healthcare services are theoretically available to all, in some cases the waiting time can be discouraging. Also, the access to the healthcare system seems to also be affected by the pandemic, at least in Romania and Italy.

*“I don’t like the public health service. You wait months to get an appointment! It’s cheap but you wait a lot. I always take care of myself.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“It is terrible because no one gives us attention. I went with my husband to the Emergency Hospital, and I had to buy Rivanol and bandages because they didn’t have one, five or six years ago or something like that. When I go to [name of a big hospital from B.] it is the same thing. I wait hours on end, and it is not only me. Now with this crisis, we should have gone in July, and it got postponed to September, and from September got postponed to November. (Interview 19, Romania)*

*“...you go there, they tell you to wait, and when you go, they don’t find what is wrong with you, here at our hospital, I mean because they don’t know. Either they send you away, and you sit and wait, and you wait for hours.” (Interview 8, Romania)*



*“For example, I would go to my gynecologist, and he would tell me to come at 11, and I would leave at 17... I am most encouraged by my husband because if it were after me, even pregnant as I am, I would only go for routine checkups. “ (Interview 4, Romania)*

*“They kept us waiting, they sometimes spoke rudely to us.” (Interview 11, Romania)*

Even when healthcare is accessible, racism still affect Roma women lives and experiences. In some cases, few in Italy, but many more in Romania, accessing the health system for themselves or for those in their care, implies experiences of social distancing and racism for Roma women.

*“However, racism towards Roma in hospitals is very high. My family and I manage to cure ourselves. However, Roma often go to private doctors precisely because they know they are discriminated against in hospitals and in public health services...When I went to hospitals with some traditionally dressed Roma women, for example, I always realized this. Specific facts did not happen, but I could feel it. It is no coincidence that Roma women are often followed by private doctors, because they know that public health services discriminate against them.*

*(Interview 2, Italy)*

The access of LGBT+ Roma women to healthcare services is even more challenging, as racism blends with homophobia and transphobia, leading to patient’s high distrust in the quality of the services they could receive.

*“Personally, as a Roma woman, I have never been discriminated against in the health services because, knowing that it would happen, I always avoid wearing traditional skirts when I need to go to health services. I have seen with my own eyes that Romanian Roma, for example, who dress traditionally, are victims of great discrimination in hospitals: even health workers avoid them. As for my gender identity, I have been very often discriminated against, in the gynecological field: doctors don't even ask you if you are homosexual, they take it for granted that you are heterosexual...” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“Terrible, terrible, there is no access, especially if you are Roma and trans. The minute you enter a pharmacy or a public institution, you feel the racism in the air. Plus, besides being a*



*trans woman, I told you, I went there because I had a problem with my finger and the woman from there asked me why I want to be a woman, it's a sin from God ...” (Interview 2, Romania)*

Immigrant Roma women in Finland expressed satisfaction in relation to the healthcare services they accessed when needed, but their satisfaction has to be understood in opposition to traumatic and humiliating experiences they had during their lifetime in their countries of origin – Romania and Bulgaria. They were treated with respect as no one shouted at them, offended or humiliated them. But has to be mentioned that most of the immigrant Roma women interviewed accessed voluntary based services, where in most of the cases translation was available. Some of the women were sent to the public healthcare sector when needed, but some others still question if they were really properly investigated.

*” [about the experience in the big hospital] Quite pleasant. So, I did not feel offended, they did not insult me in any way. They behaved pretty nice” (Interview 1, Finland)*

*“It’s for nothing if I go to the big hospital in K.(...) they don’t give you anything, only pain killers. (...) To hell with them and their ibuprofen. (...) I don’t know. They differentiate.”  
(Interview 5, Finland)*

*“ ...the big hospital is in Kalasatama. And when we get there it’s different. You sometimes find good people who guide you. But there are many who don’t want to guide you.” (Interview 9, Finland)*

*“I was hospitalized one week. I was treated very well there also. Perfusions, antibiotics, good food, clean food, um everybody in the hospital, nothing to say about the hospital, I stayed there one week, they also allowed my husband to stay with me and sleep there also (...) because I did not speak English and he does. And they allowed him to stay with me” (Interview 7, Finland)*



## Affordability of healthcare services

Even when accessible, the healthcare system in Romania, but also in other countries from the former communist bloc, such as Bulgaria, has a low level of affordability. For those accessing the systems from the position of the poorest and most excluded members of society, the pills and some of the treatments are still not available for free. Also, the hidden cost of “informal payments” might increase the perception that the healthcare services are less affordable.

The cost of services discourages Roma women from accessing the services they or their children need, due to the costs associated with any diagnostic and treatment. Experiences shared by Roma women with respect to the affordability of healthcare services are scarce, as they try, as much as possible, to access the healthcare system only when it is an emergency and, in this way, to avoid the supplementary cost related to services that are available for free (on paper). The lack of adequate budgeting of the healthcare system in countries such as Romania contributes to the low reaching out of health services among the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Also, distance from hospitals and the “informal payments” they have to make to nurses or doctors, even if the service is public, discourage them even more from accessing it. Moreover, as Roma women are those taking care of their families and their dependents, their health needs are left aside, with a huge cost on their health and their working capacity.

*“We were very poor. I didn’t feel like going to the doctor and giving him two or three hundred thousand... With that money, my children could eat.” (Interview 7, Romania)*

*“I didn’t have any money to give to the doctors... doctors are like vampires when it comes to money.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“In fact, in Bulgaria Roma people have to pay to be examined [by the health care personnel] if they do not have health insurance, and in most cases, they have to be in a very difficult situation that they would go to see a doctor. Generally, it is like that: in the case of Roma they have to [be so sick that they] lie in the bed to be able to call an ambulance and to be examined. It is like that in general.” (Interview 23, Finland, about Bulgarian experience)*



*“Us Roma do not really go to the hospital. If it is something urgent, we call the ambulance.”*

*(Interview 12, Finland)*

*“...Yes, they behaved nicely, but because I put money in their pockets. Because I put money in their pockets, they behaved very nicely. But if you don't give them money, you can imagine what it's like... (Interview 7, Romania)*

*“If you have money and give something, the quality is higher. If you don't have money, the quality is lower. This is how it is for us. If you have money, you get treated differently.”*

*(Interview 6, Romania)*

### Discouragement in accessing healthcare services

Even if far from being perfect in Italy and Finland, the healthcare system from Romania stands out in a far too negative way when seen through the experiences of Roma women. Most of the narratives collected pointed out to frequent situations of discouragement and fear to access healthcare services among Roma women. These have the most diverse causes:

- Long waiting time coupled with low entrusting levels in the quality of treatments

*“I would rather search on the internet or ask certain people who know better, than end up waiting at the doors to be treated badly.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

*“...because I was gypsy... I don't know... they made me wait in vain for hours. I was there because I had an appointment, but they kept me waiting... or I don't know... they were afraid I would steal, so they were hiding their bags. So, yes, I've had this kind of problem.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

- Racism, transphobic and humiliating services and behaviors

*“... very cruel. In the hospital, yes, I was very humiliated. This is why I never go by myself to the hospital, only with my husband.” (Interview 4, Romania)*



*“I never want to go to the doctor in Romania, I am afraid and scared, if something happens to me, I’ll go to Italy... First of all, I am scared of their racism and discrimination. Because I asked for medical help when I had the problem with my finger and never, since then. Because I am afraid to go there. They could harm me because I am trans, because I don’t want to be a man, because I don’t want to be the way they want me to be. No sister, because I had a bad experience with my finger. How can I put my life in the hands of a transphobic, racist and misogynist surgeon? He could kill me because of hate. He would say “a transvestite less.” No, sister! And the same happens to Roma. In their minds it’s better to treat 100 Romanians than a single Roma.” (Interview 2, Romania)*

- Classism

*“Ah, and here is another issue because if you call 112 and you have a less chiseled vocabulary, less academic, you are discriminated against from the very beginning. They will call you “filthy gypsy” or something like that and they’ll hang up the phone.” (Interview 2, Romania).*

- Fear and shame

*“There is this fear that you are at their mercy, and especially when you are visibly a Roma, and you have no education, it is horror. I think it is a fear that we can never understand if we don’t experience it. To be at the mercy of someone who could harm you, only because you are Roma, I think it is horror, honestly, and I’ve noticed that many women have this fear.” (Interview 20, Romania)*

*“I was ashamed to, forgive me, to be checked down there. I had a cold from those nights spend in the cold, my belly hurt me badly and I could not even sit.” (Interview 6, Finland)*

In order to meet their health needs, when they have the resources, Roma women from Italy but also from Romania access the private health sector, mostly in order to avoid racism and humiliation. Not white-passing women are more reluctant to accessing the public system, as their ethnic identity is in fact impossible to hide.



*“I brought her to the family doctor, and we went for a checkup at a private clinic. She doesn’t want to, she is afraid, is this fear of doctors because she has heard I don’t know what... yes, it is obvious she is Roma and... (Interview 20, Romania)*

*“I’d rather go to a private clinic than wait.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

Low quality of services provided by the public system is frequently coupled with racism, classism and homophobia / transphobia, the Roma LGBT+ community being the most exposed to exclusion and marginalization. If they cannot hide their sexual identity, the respondents try to find more inclusive systems and services across Europe, in order to address their health issues.

#### Quality of services provided by the family physicians

The family physician is among the most important paths to the health system, when specialized services are needed. They have to assess each medical situation, and to facilitate the access of the patients to the checkups, analyses, specialized services and treatments they need. Generally, the majority of Romanian Roma women participating in the study assessed their experiences with the family physician as positive. But also, Romanian experiences point out to the fact that racism and classism are present in each segment of the healthcare system in Romania.

Most of the Roma women are complaining of the services they receive from the family physician when, in fact they are going to treat the health conditions of their children. The services received from the family physicians, even if only in some cases, imply raising voices, superficial checkups, scarce communication and limited ability to communicate and explain medical information to the patients.

*“If you say the child has a headache, and he has pain here, he says, “Shut up, I know what is wrong with him”. And he prescribes something, I go, pay for it, and that’s all.” (Interview 18, Romania)*





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*“As a social aid beneficiary, I sometimes get the feeling that you are being offered the worst medication. He acts as if he is doing you a favor. I don’t know... I make the difference between... because I’ve been to private doctors, and they give you different drugs as long as you pay for them. If you pay, you’ll get a different kind of medication and examination. But when you go to the family doctor, you won’t receive the service and the medication you need because you are a social aid beneficiary.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“I was discouraged many times by all these things. I was even talking to my sister and telling her: „it’s different when you go to a private doctor and pay for the consultation, but if you go to this family doctor, he doesn’t give you the right treatment, he doesn’t explain you properly. Why is this discouraging difference?” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“...but because the doctor has too many patients, I don’t believe he gives you the respect you deserve as a patient. It’s also hard to get an appointment. Now, if you are sick and you don’t make an appointment before, you’ll not be received. But if you are sick today, and he sees you in two weeks, as it happened to me... Will I still have the symptoms I have now in two weeks? It’s very difficult to deal with the current system. And even if you go to the doctor with your child, they’ll still argue with you: „Why did you come without an appointment?” If the child is feeling sick now, how could I make an appointment later?” (Interview 15, Romania)*

## Pap Test and breast controls

Questions regarding the pap tests and breast controls were applied only in Italy and Romania. Almost half of the Roma women interviewed in Italy declared they had such check-ups carried out. In Romania, as pap tests are mandatory one year after giving birth, they are more common among respondents, while only a minority of women had breast controls.

Access to pap tests and breast control could be limited by feelings of shame and embarrassment. Even if not mentioned as such, for some women the possibility to select physicians of a specific gender could lead to increasing openness to gynecological services.





Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“I don't go to the gynecologist. If I have pains, I go, otherwise I don't go. If I'm not sick, I'm not going. I do blood tests every two-three years.” (Interview 10, Italy)*

*“I never go to the gynecologist; I don't need to.” (Interview 14, Italy)*

As a pattern, in both countries, the awareness regarding the importance of these two types of checkups for women's health is higher among younger Roma women and decreases with age. It is possible that checkups for being pregnant and giving birth create the premises for Roma women's access to the preventive services existing in any health system.

Also, the variation in the level of education explains to a large extent the willingness of Roma women to run pap and breast controls, as the level of awareness regarding their importance increases with the level of education.

#### Discriminatory treatments within hospitals

Racism, classism and transphobia has been encountered in all categories of professionals from the healthcare system, from the receptionist, to nurses and doctors. Roma women are subject to such treatment, both when they are patients, but also when accompanying their dependents. They are often experienced as a lack of adequate explanations, biased prioritization of cases or lack of empathy in treating patients.

*“... but doctors are often racists. They see that you are a gypsy and don't explain things to you well. They talk in such a difficult way and they don't care if you understand what you have or not. I always have this problem, that I just don't understand. In fact, when I can, I have my children accompany me, as they speak Italian better, but even for them it is difficult to understand. However, I only go to the doctor when I feel terrible and can't walk, otherwise I take [pain killers, ed.] and that's it. (Interview 14, Italy)*

*“... there is discrimination against Roma in health services. If you are not clean, or if you are not combed well, they treat you badly. They don't give you the red code, which is urgent, but they*



*give you the green code, so you wait as long as they want. This is exactly what happened to me once.” (Interview 7, Italy)*

*“I went to a private clinic for tests, and the receptionist asked me:*

*- How should I write down: Mister or Madam?*

*- I gave you my ID card*

*- Yes, but I thought it’s a mistake in your ID*

*- No, ma’am, that’s me, I am a transgender person.*

*- What transgender means?*

*- Ma’am, you finished Medicine School and you don’t know what a gender woman means?*

*- Miss or Mister, don’t take me like that!*

*- Dear lady, it’s your job to know about these things. You know what, let’s leave it at that, I am going to another clinic!” (Interview 2, Romania)*

*“... they would send us out of the room saying they want to clean while we were not able to stand up on our feet. I was clinging to the wall in the hallway. They would say that they are cleaning, wiping, they cleaned with chlorine, our noses burned, we couldn’t stay there. We said, “Do not clean the floor with chlorine, we get sick”. “No, because you are black”, you are this way, and they yelled at us.” (Interview 18, Romania)*

One of the specific forms of discrimination and unequal treatment in the healthcare system are the superficial checkups, when patients do not receive adequate time and attention as physicians avoid touching them or their children. Experiences of superficial checkups were shared by Romanian Roma women having the lowest level of education and coming from rural areas. They are also mentioned by Romanian women migrating to Finland when they compared the quality of services received in their destination country to those received back home.

*“This family doctor treats us too indifferently. I don’t know, either she’s racist or she’s sick and tired of gypsies. I went there the other day because my legs were swollen and I felt like I have something here (pointing to her neck). “I am dying, doctor, I can’t breathe”. I couldn’t even walk. The blood pressure was low and my heart was pounding. I thought I was dying. And she doesn’t even want to put her hands on you, she didn’t give me a prescription because I should*



*have had an appointment. I had to pay for the prescription she gave me.” “ (Interview 7, Romania)*

*“You have to have money all the time to give them, but my family doctor is good. I transferred from to [name of the locality] because the doctors from here wouldn’t even consult the children. You just describe your medical issue, he’ll give you a prescription, and that’s all. “(Interview 17, Romania)*

*“But when you go to the doctor and he sees you as a gypsy, he won’t touch you.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“In Romania they don’t touch you, if you go to a hospital, they say eh, Gypsy, shame, I won’t touch them. Yes. Because they are Roma, Gypsies, they don’t wash, how can I touch them, but if you give them money at the public hospital in Romania then they touch the person, but otherwise no.” (Interview 3, Finland, about Romanian experience)*

*“[ed. In Finland] There were 3 at, one at my head and 2 nurses were at my feet. Of course, you can imagine, giving birth is painful and hard. But they treated me nicely, they kept encouraging me, encouraging me, a little bit more and the child will come out, just a bit more, until the child came out healthy ... In Romania it was, you can imagine, they would not even touch me, not even... They treated me so badly with my first pregnancy.” (Interview 7, Finland, comparing Finnish and Romanian experience)*

Roma women have to deal with racism also when they are accompanying their friends or family members to healthcare services. The level of education of the Roma women or of those accompanying them mediates the quality of services received by patients and sometimes in fact it makes up for the lack of training of the medical staff in communicating with the most vulnerable of the citizens.

*“...there is racism in hospitals: for example, if a Roma has to have surgery, the doctor for instance says to her son: "Tomorrow your mom will have surgery but please, do not stay 10 people in the waiting room and speak softly”. This is already a form of racism.... Moreover, the non-Roma patients do not want to share hospital rooms with the Roma and therefore they make*



*them change. Absurd. Once, it actually happened to me that I have been discriminated against at the hospital: I had to do an ultrasound, I had an appointment but they [nurses, ed.] let another woman in before me. The idea is that the Roma can wait, as they have nothing to do.” (Interview 3, Italy)*

*“They did not deny them, but they used a different tone. Like they were superior (she imitates the superior tone), “Why didn’t you bring the child in time?”, yelling, making us feel like the last people on earth. (Interview 6, Romania)*

*“My grandfather suffered a lot because of this, and also my grandmother, and when I learned the language of gadji (Romanians), I went with them to the dispensary. Otherwise, they would not let you in, or they would yell. And when I knew how to speak nicely and correctly, they no longer yelled at my grandmother (crying).” (Interview 1, Romania)*

*“So is my uncle [ed. having a mental disability]. I went with him this year to our doctor, and the people don’t know how to behave with someone like him. (...)He had an attack, and he lost consciousness, something cerebral, I don’t know because he didn’t stay to have medical tests done. I managed to convince him, with patience, because you need a lot of patience, and I brought him to the hospital. He panics when he sees the nurses, and we almost convinced him. A nurse raised her voice at him, and he didn’t stay. He got up from the bed and left, and they didn’t manage to do anything to him. I told her, “Ma’am, he is a man with problems. This is not how you approach a man like him”. (Interview 20, Romania)*

In benefiting from healthcare services, racism rarely comes alone in hampering the experiences. Most of the time, it is accompanied by classism as the most humiliating and shameful experiences were shared by Roma women with low levels of education, coming from rural areas, having darker skin and sometimes being beneficiaries of the social aid / minimum guarantee income. Even if a high level of education of the beneficiaries or their dependents clearly eases the experiences, it is not so simple to evidence only the level of education as an intersectional dimension. For most of the gadje people level of education acts like a proxy for social class and ethnicity.



## Experiences during pregnancy and giving birth

Some of the most shocking experiences shared by Roma women are related to giving birth, while the most tough are coming again from Romania. If you are a poor, less educated and not-working Roma woman, you have high chances of receiving differential treatment and even being traumatized by experiences endured during giving birth. Also, if your skin tone is darker, even if you have a respectable social status, the chances of receiving a respectful treatment are still high. As this is a context in which Roma women cannot avoid or postpone going to the hospital, the experiences presented are tough and cruel, the lack of empathy and professional standards in exercising professions are striking. Experiences shared by Roma women are not unique and they are also present in other Balkan countries.<sup>10</sup>

*“I had a negative experience with a gynecologist who talks vulgarly. She talks vulgarly not only to me but to any other woman too. And every time, you could hear her saying: “all the gypsy women know is to spread their legs and have babies, and then they come to me moaning.” I talked to her nicely when it was the case, and I responded to her insults in return, accordingly.”*

*(Interview 9, Romania)*

*“Since I got there, he treated me badly anyway. He said, “Why did you come here? Couldn’t you stay in [ed. the closest hospital to her domicile]? Go home, you have nothing to eat?” “How can you say something like that, doctor?” But I couldn’t talk because I said to myself, “If I give him a piece of my mind, I am at his mercy”. (Interview 16, Romania)*

*“When they heard that I am 40 years old and I have six children at home, and the girl is the seventh child, they behaved so badly. They cut me in such a way that I couldn’t stand on my feet. I couldn’t sit on my back or in any way. When I went to the hospital to get my stitches removed, the nurse told me: “Were you a pig on the table or a human being?” To them, I was. That’s how badly they treated me. (...) And my daughter was badly treated too, and that’s why I bottle-fed her. She was taken away from me because they “discovered” that I had tuberculosis. I told them*

---

<sup>10</sup> There were selected only the most striking experiences, where intersectionality is also easy to be spotted.



*that it was not true, I could not have tuberculosis. “Nobody in my family had suffered from lungs. How could I have tuberculosis? You didn’t take any blood tests. How did you find out?” After a day, after they kept my daughter away from me, they brought her back to me, saying they made a mistake. “A mistake had been made, but look, my child refuses to breastfeed. What am I going to do now? Where do I get money from to buy milk powder?” (Interview 15, Romania)*

*“I was in pain and they were shouting out loud that we are dirty. I felt offended then. Why do they say that we are dirty? How could anyone go to the doctor dirty? “Because that’s how you, gypsies, are! You spread your legs” - that’s what a racist woman used to say. But I would notice the difference - Romanian women were treated nicely, they didn’t argue with them, they didn’t yell at them. (Interview 17, Romania)*

The Romanian Roma women, who are engaged in circulatory migration practices in between Romania and Finland, shared some of their experiences of giving birth in both countries (Romania and Finland), thus better evidencing also how a healthcare system may treat their patients with respect and dignity.

*“When I went to Romania [sighs] he asked me, why don’t you have a family doctor? Where were you until now? In Finland. And why did you not give birth there? If I had problems here and I had to come to Romania, where can I give birth? [sighs] And he was yelling at me. And I kept quiet. I had to keep quiet. [sighs] In [town in Moldova], a doctor. He did a bad c-section. He cut me more than he should have. Here, you don’t even see it... ” (Interview 15, Finland)*

*“I wanted to give birth here, but it was my foolishness. It would have been better here. Because at home I suffered. They did not even do an anesthesia for me to be calm. I was... I was afraid, I thought, who knows, where I will give birth, where... I thought in Romania will be better... I did not have a house, you understand?” (Interview 14, Finland)*



## Violence and treatment for violence

Some of the Roma women shared their experience of physical attacks in public spaces or even of domestic violence. Even if badly hurt, Roma women are reluctant and avoid going to hospitals in order to receive adequate treatment. Again, Roma women must have their health severely at risk, in order to decide to go to the hospital for adequate treatments.

*“Yes, he was beating me on the street. People on the street helped me. Since I’ve started having children onward, he was beating me before I had the girl, but after, he would beat me until I was in danger. Once the ambulance came. I went to have surgery. I stayed in the hospital for a month and a half, I sent the boy to my mother in Giurgiu, he was little. [ed. Staff] behave well.”*

*(Interview 8, Romania)*

*“Perhaps I needed to, but I didn’t go. (...) He came, he has beaten me up, he hit me in the back, and he probably touched my lungs, or I don’t know, I spitted blood, and that’s when I went to my mother. No, I didn’t go to the hospital. “ (Interview 16, Romania)*

*“We have no right to call police, because if we called police, they would have locked him up. And after his relatives would have attacked me. We don’t have the right to call the police or similar. Sometimes his mother or father came, if they were close, and took him away. But when not, there was no way.” (Interview 20, Finland, about Bulgarian experience)*

LGBT+ Roma women are among the most exposed to physical attacks in the public spaces and even in queer clubs. When such incidents happen, they avoid both reporting them to the police and going to a hospital, as both institutions proved to be racist and homophobic / transphobic in their prior experience. As women being assaulted in public spaces, their fear of racist and transphobic attitudes seems to be more intolerant when it comes from institutions who should provide support.

*“... about what happened to me while in LGBT+ and straight clubs. Yes, I went through violent situations. The club lighting is dim, so it can’t be noticed that you are Roma. [Ed. nobody came to recue] Never. On the contrary, I protected 3 friends I was with. I had a broken rib. I*





*recovered. No, I didn't [ed. go to hospital] because I realized it wasn't that bad. At first, the pain was pretty awful, but later I noticed it got better, it was more tolerable, and I said ok, I have to reduce the effort. I am a person who practices sports almost every day, and it affected me a lot in this regard, and hence I decided to take it easy for two months." (Interview 5, Romania)*

*"I've been through many episodes ... and in nightclubs, there was a guy who threw a bottle at me, because he couldn't stand trans persons. Another episode happened in C., when another guy threw a bottle at me... No, I preferred to come home, to heal myself, to lick my wounds like cats. No, because I told you I am afraid of hospitals. You go there as a victim, and you are the one to blame." (Interview 2, Romania)*

#### Patterns of access to healthcare system

First of all, we aimed to evidence the correlation between the different types of healthcare systems and their accessibility and affordability for some of the most vulnerable women.

As the figure below reveals, there are strong patterns of association evidencing high accessibility and affordability for the Finnish and Italian systems, and lower levels for the Romanian one. These results show, in fact, that access to the healthcare system and practices within it are influenced by the structural inequalities embedded in the design of some health system, the Romanian one in this case. The reluctance in accessing the healthcare services is directly influenced by how the right to health services of the most vulnerable are addressed, operationalized and budgeted in each system.





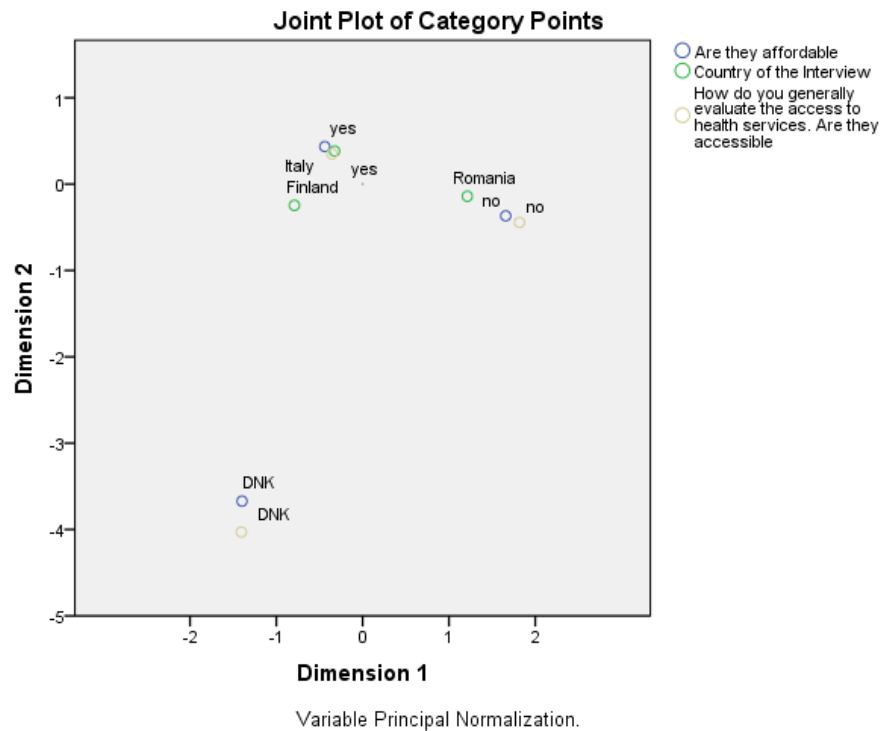
Deaconess Foundation



Center for Not-for-profit Law



Figure 6. Multiple correspondence analyses between the perception on accessibility and affordability of health services and country of the interview.



In the same manner, we analyzed the differential treatment and discriminatory practices suffered when accessing the healthcare system, taking into consideration the employment status of the respondents. The discriminatory practices in the Romanian health system affect mainly the Roma women who are not under an employment contract, even if, as we highlighted above, they access the healthcare system mainly for emergencies, for giving birth as well as accompanying their children, when needed. Even if guaranteed by law, the reaching out of the universal healthcare services proved to be extremely low and the quality is more than scarce.

On the other hand, Finland is characterized by the best services provided, in terms of non-discriminatory practices to Roma women, most of them with no education.



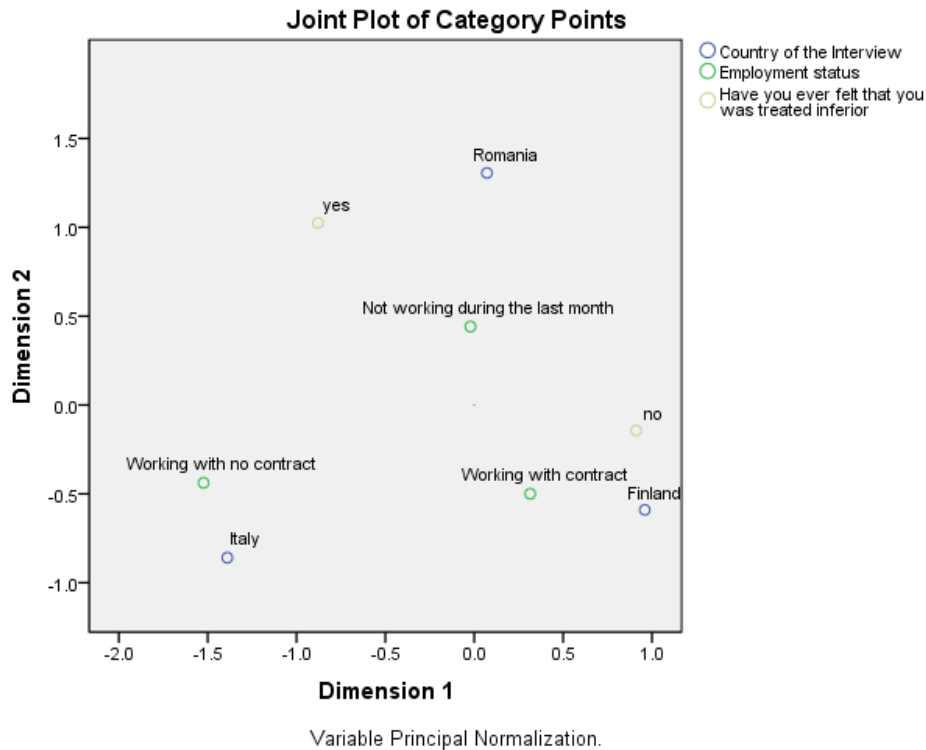
Deaconess Foundation



Center for Not-for-profit Law



Figure 7. Multiple correspondence analyses between the perception on being treated different, country of the interview and employment status



## Conclusions

As we have seen in this chapter, health care services and access to it continues to be scarce especially in the Romanian case where there are systemic problems. Placing this into a context is relevant as it gives a bigger picture of how the system works when it comes to women from marginalized communities, rural places, with low levels of education, Roma or LGBT+. In comparison with Italy and Finland where women still have problems with treatment, thus there is a clear understanding of procedures to follow when accessing public services. In general, where there is a developed system with high quality public care services, the probability for marginalized women to access it is higher in comparison with public care systems that fail to provide even for



the general population. Within these systems (such in Romania) the treatment and access for the most marginalized women is even more negative.

Thus, the interview was designed with a gender perspective on women's health issues and revealed how women address the system when they need it, much more for the children or other members of their families, or in situations of giving birth. As they usually left aside their health problems, when racism intersected with low socio-economic backgrounds and transphobic behaviors, Roma women get humiliating services and behaviors from all categories and professions from receptionist to nurses and doctors.

For Roma women from Romania accessing the services that exist, at least, on paper is quite difficult and discouraging. Even if health services are theoretically available to all, the reaching out is scarce due to the costs associated with any diagnostic and treatment, waiting time and the current pandemic, "informal payments" they have to give to nurses or doctors, distance from hospitals and superficial check-ups.

The access of transgender Roma women to health services is even more challenging, as racism intersects with homophobia and transphobia, conducting to high distrust of patients in the quality treatment. That is why women from Romania and Italy tend to address the private health sector for checkup mostly in order to avoid racism, transphobia and humiliation. Especially not white passing women and transgender women are more reluctant in accessing the public system, being in fact impossible for them to hide their identities. The fact that doctors and nurses still act and treat patients with biases and prejudice is a clear indicator for the lack of inclusiveness and awareness for diversity. There is a strong need for a clear protocol of respecting human rights when working with all categories of patients.

These practices are in fact influenced by the structural inequalities embedded in the design of some health system, especially for the Romanian case. Rights to the healthcare system for most vulnerable groups are in direct connection with how the budgets are designed and operationalized to increase access for them. The poorer you are, with lower educational level, without a job, with a dark skin tone and being seen different (as transgender women for example) the higher the risk to receive a different treatment or to be traumatized by the experiences of birth.



## 7. ROMA WOMEN, UNPAID WORKS AND LABOR MARKET

Analyzing of the experiences of Roma women in accessing the labor market is one of the most difficult tasks of this study, as most of the experiences of discrimination are so subtle, and are only described in terms of “having a feeling of discrimination”.

The model of interaction with the gadje world is already established, the education level is less upgradable, so most of the experiences of Roma women are, in fact, contextualized as experiences with a history of discouragement. Therefore, they access the formal labor market and continue to struggle to obtain sometimes unstable incomes and hard work on the informal or inferior segment of the labor market.

### Labor market expectations

The transgenerational patterns of discouragement and the lack of access to the labor market are transmitted both as part of racist experiences and as gendered roles attributed to Roma boys and girls, where less expectations from the labor market were inoculated to the girls since childhood. The unpaid domestic work of Roma women, as well as employment in traditional occupations, in informal jobs or working to support the family in its economic activities are a significant part of the gendered roles that they were socialized for.

As interviews are sometimes underlined, this “traditional” allocation of gender roles fails in real life, when Roma families split or when Roma men fail to get an adequate job on the labor



market. And when it fails, women continue to do their housework according to prescribed gender roles, but also have to provide for their families, mainly through informal or seasonal activities.

*“As far as expectations in terms of having a job, not much. What was really important was to get married and to have babies. My brothers too and my sister didn’t work.” (Interview 20, Italy)*

*“I don't work now; I became a housewife. I used to work at the Serbian embassy as a cleaning lady, but I stopped working because my husband made me quit, he got nervous because he couldn't control me. I had my commitment, I organized everything in the evening. I liked it. This was my dream, to go to work. I went by subway, I knew people. I was another person when I worked. I was happy.” (Interview 16, Italy)*

*“They said that even a job as a cleaning woman is good enough, because you get money and you can buy everything you need. You need nothing more.” (Interview 3, Romania)*

*“The expectations, in terms of employment, were not so high, as it was already known that there is not a lot of work in Italy, even if people go to University. It was important to my parents that I graduated from high school and that I had a normal job, such as a saleswoman or waitress.” (Interview 19, Italy)*

*“In Roma community the gender roles are really strict and strong; Roma women have to have a family and children at a young age, they do not have a chance often to study when they are young.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

*“Back then, yes, probably. Or at least, that is how it was in my family. My father didn’t let her go to work. He told her: “your duty is to stay home, to take care of the children. There is no sense for you to go to work if I can manage.” (Interview 13, Romania)*

## Double burden for Roma women

As society changed, and the traditional occupations of Roma communities started to disappear (as demand for traditional Roma services and goods in the gadje world changed or



decreased), Roma families adjusted to the new times, supporting Roma girls in education and having a job on the long run. The conservative model changed a bit, making the benefits of education and employment more visible to Roma girls, for the welfare of their own families and children. In fact, the stigma of poverty pushed Roma women to teach their children in this direction. Meanwhile, there are almost no models for reconciling work and family life and sharing child rearing responsibilities among parents that could be passed on to the new generations. The double burden became the new prescription for the Roma girls and women.

*“I have always told my daughter to work and at the same time to be a mother, a wife and housewife. This is what needs to be done.” (Interview 6, Italy)*

*“My father and mother always told us that school is important. They wanted us to have a good job. Roma women are capable of being both housewives and workers.” (Interview 4, Italy)*

*“My mother was a housewife, so she didn't have this problem. The other women, who work, are able to deal with the 2 kinds of responsibilities [being a mother and having a job, ed.]. Today it is a bit more accepted that women work, also because, today, life is very expensive. My brother's wife, for example, is a mother and a wife, but she also works in the supermarket, and this is accepted. As I said before, my father and mother wanted us to study precisely to have a good job.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“Regarding my job, my Roma relatives do not have high expectations. But they do have expectations about my motherhood. They always tell me: “So, when will you have a baby?”. My gagé family expected me to work. In fact, they initially wanted me to go to university, but I didn't want to. However, as far as my job, I don't feel in contrast with my Roma relatives. Rather, they tell me to work as well, but also to be a mother.” (Interview 13, Italy)*



## House chores of Roma girls and women

The lack of a model for reconciling work and family tasks, as well as the gender norms of raising girls to become future wives and mothers practically opened the door for doing hard and difficult domestic tasks since early childhood. The poorer the family, the higher the probability of involving girls in household activities from an early age. As one of the respondents characterized the situation herself – ” Roma children are raised through work”.

The domestic work carried out by Roma girls within their families is in some cases the reason for the perceived “low motivation” for education, as well as for dropping out at early ages. The lack of motivation, ambition and “not liking schools” perceived by teachers and school personnel as characteristics of Roma girls coming from disadvantaged communities are sometimes more of a consequence of the hard house chores that Roma girls have to perform.

The informal and low paid activities that mothers and especially single mothers are urged to undertake, in order to provide for their families are among the most important reasons for which mothers were passing housework activities to their girls.

*“My mother worked, she went to the countryside and came back with the bottles to wash them by myself. I babysat my five brothers, cleaned, cooked, and everything.” (Interview 8, Romania)*

*“It was hard work. I would wake up at 6, warm water, and start doing housework until 7, and I was done by 4-5 pm. My mother would come home in the evening. I had to cook for my brothers. I had to clean them, so my mother could find them all clean because I always thought, what if mom finds them dirty.” (Interview 8, Romania)*

*“If you left me home babysitting a one-and-a-half-year-old child, you would tell me in vain to go to school. And that happened when I was about to become a 5th grader. (..) But I got used to the child and housework. I could only see in front of my eyes these tasks. That's why I tell my daughters "go to school". If I had told my daughter to take care of her little sister, she wouldn't have had time for school. ... It is just that I used to go to school when I wanted, and because the school was near me, the teacher would go out the window, saying: “Come on, dear. Now that*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*you have finished feeding the chickens and the pigs, I am asking you to come to school.” I slept on the bench many times.” (Interview 9, Romania)*

*“I had to wash bottles, jars, sweep the floors in that shack, sweep outside, hand wash my father’s and mother’s clothes... Of course, they had expectations from me...they asked me why don’t you do this or that, when you get married you will have to learn. Ok, let’s do this. And you can imagine. I cried there, I went to take the broom and dustpan, I swept, I dusted, I poured water in the basin, I washed clothes, I washed dishes, rinsed them, so they would not scold me. ... yes, it was for me because, for example, a child of 12, 10-12 years old, of course it was a lot of work.”*

*(Interview 7, Finland)*

Therefore, the lack of an adequate minimum income for families with many children, living in poverty and pushed to provide for their families in any conditions are among the reasons for Roma girls dropping out of school. The experiences of hard house chores undertaken from an early age are coming only from Romania, where inequality and the severe poverty among children are the highest among European countries (Eurostat, 2020b). Inequality and exclusions are thus reproduced from one generation to another. Although Roma women and communities are trying to close the gaps with the gadje world, more generations and structural changes are needed in order to reach this purpose.

### Working from early ages

In some cases, Roma girls are also doing economic activities along with their families from early ages, but to a far less extent as compared with the long and invisible housework.

*“Already as a child, together with my brothers and sisters, I started working with my parents: my father and my mother sold souvenirs, bought them and then resold them, without a contract [informally, ed.]. However, we could honestly survive. My parents wanted me to work honestly and I taught my children the same thing. My mother worked and was also a housewife, it's*

*normal, all women did this.” (Interview 6, Italy)*





*“My mother always worked. And I worked with her since I was little. When I was on vacation, I used to go to the farm. Back then, there were many farms in the country-side. And I was picking fruits in their season. I was crazy about cherries and peaches.” (Interview 3, Romania)*

### Discouragement in accessing labor market

Only 13 Roma women out of the total of 62 interviewed were looking for a job. When asked about the reasons for their inactivity on the labor market, a new range of explanations emerged. Roma women do not always make the choice to become housewives, they are constrained in this direction, with no real alternatives.

Racism is one of the reasons why Roma women are discouraged in searching for a job, but it is far less present as compared to other areas analyzed in the previous sections.

*“Here you arrive, they see that you are a gypsy and there are shacks for you. Your life stops: who hires a person living in a camp? ... I'm not looking for a job, I can't find it anyway.”*

*(Interview 6, Italy)*

*“It is impossible to find a job, it is so difficult even for Italians that attended school!” (Interview 17, Italy)*

Family responsibilities, exhausting housework and the lack of access to quality employment and adequate incomes are often the main factors behind Roma women's discouragement to enter the labor market. Domestic work is also supported by their daughters, especially in the absence of modern technology to ease their work, such as a washing machine.

*“I had nowhere to work. Maybe If I didn't have so many children... I don't know what to say. To leave seven kids home alone and go to work, and when you come back home to start from zero, to do cleaning, cooking, laundry... I don't know... It's been a few years since we are doing better, we have a washing machine, we rely on... But before, it was difficult. I remember I used to come back home from the greenhouse where I was working, and before arriving at home, my*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*oldest daughter would soak the clothes so I could hand-wash them later. There was no cooked food, no dishes washed and I would go to bed completely exhausted. The next day, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the Romanians would come to my door saying that we have to start working earlier in the morning because it's hot in the greenhouse.” (Interview 15, Romania)*

The structural racism that limits the access of Roma women to education and healthcare, are replaced in the case of the labor market by the lack of education, lack of proper working experience or, in the case of immigrant women, by a lack of communication skills in the local language. Even if they understand that formal education is a must for obtaining a better job, it seems that they question some of the criteria imposed by the non-Roma, such as language skills in jobs where you don't have to communicate, such as cleaning jobs, for example. The labor market is not adapted to the skills and level of education that migrants, minority groups or refugees, even if solutions could be found.

*“Every now and then I give a look on Facebook, but not in a very careful way, because I get discouraged: they always look for workers with experience.” (Interview 5, Italy)*

*“If you were to go to work, you would work as a day-laborer. If you don't have an education, you can't go anywhere because nobody hires you.” (Interview 12, Romania)*

*“(..) They would want to know how many grades you finished. But instead, if you want a job as a cleaning lady, the level of education doesn't matter. You'll get hired.... Those with education could be hired as saleswomen. That's the problem with Roma - that they do not have enough education. I've tried to continue my education. I dropped out of the 5th grade, and then I continued until the 7th grade.” (Interview 17, Romania)*

*“Because I don't know the language. For that it's hard.” (Interview 19, Finland)*

*“Because we don't know the language to look for jobs. If we knew the language, we wouldn't sit and beg, but request for work.” (Interview 20, Finland)*

*“I want to study, to learn the Finnish language and if I know Finnish, I can enter work faster because I speak, I mean I can talk to Finnish people. And I know how to write, to read, it's a different life, I have more access, more entrance. Without education you cannot do anything. If*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*you don't know how to read, if I don't know how to write my name or how to write something, I don't have any access anywhere, I live on this earth like animals. But if I have education, I know how to read, to write in Finnish, then I have more access because I know how to talk to people, to behave nicely with them... " (Interview 3, Finland)*

All societies need persons to perform elementary occupations, so access to the labor market without having an education is, at least theoretically, possible. But, when it comes to Roma women, it seems that racist and discriminatory practices are now well hidden behind the level of education required to access even elementary occupations.

*"I told you that for Finnish people it seems strange that [sighs] that I don't know, that Gypsy women don't have education. They don't know anything. We know how to clean, we are good for work, we are good at cleaning, we are hardworking because that is how we are raised, **we are raised through work**, we did not grow up in Finland, right? We grew up in Romania and we had to work, to clean, to wash, to respect our tradition, to wash pans and dishes, to clean, to take care of everything [sighs]. We are good, hard workers, but people here in Finland say we are not, um, how to say it, we are not employable because we do not have education. And here the most important thing is knowing the Finnish language..." (Interview 7, Finland)*

Even when they find the way and they are accompanying their parents in addressing public employment services, Roma families fail to find adequate support, while the racism displayed by public servants leads to even more discouragement in accessing the labor market.

*"I once went with my father, I believe I was 16 years old, and we went to the Employment Agency. They couldn't tell that I was Roma, but because my father was dark, they could tell he is. They said there are no jobs, and my father was a bit harsher with them, "So what are we supposed to do? Should we hit people in the head, steal, how come you have no job offers?" And they said that's how you gypsies are, big-mouthed... When we want to work, it's still not good." (Interview 19, Romania)*

The pressure on Roma women, both within their own families and communities, but also in interaction with the gadge world (employers, public employment services) leads to them being discouraged to access paid work. Living in communities without adequate infrastructure, being



raised to take care of your family since childhood, do not leave Roma girls and women much time and energy for proper investment in their future.

The low level of education among Roma girls and dropping out of education without finalizing even compulsory education has “become” a stigma for the entire life and are delivered by society as an individual failure. However, as we have clearly shown in the section dedicated to education, dropping out at early ages is rather an institutional failure than an individual one.

### Discrimination in accessing labor market

Different dimensions of Roma women identities are invoked when their access to even a job interview can be denied. When obtained, job interviews are so subjective and not-transparent, most of the real reasons for not considering Roma women candidates remaining hidden. In some of the cases, belonging to the Roma community could be a reason for not getting an interview or a job, while in other situations, ethnic background mixes with the immigrant status in blocking the access to the labor market. If women can be depicted as migrants based on their name, the skin tone and language pronunciation become visible during the interview. For these reasons, many women do not even get an interview or are rejected/never called after the interview. But in many situations, Roma women’s quest for the labor market ends before they actually have the opportunity to take on a job interview.

*“It happened to me once, I left my CV and then I was told by others that I had been rejected because my surname showed my Romani belonging.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“I don’t know if it had anything to do with it, but when I talked about it, everything was nice, beautiful, okay. When I told them I am Roma, I felt like the whole interview took another turn. They didn’t insult me, but I felt reluctance from their side, and I’ve realized from the start that it is going to be a no. And how did they find out I am Roma? Well, you can see it and so on, but I’ve also started talking about the Roma NGOs because they asked me about it, they were very curious, and then, in all honesty, I felt them reluctant.” (Interview 10, Romania)*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



*“I have had situations in which I feel that my ethnicity has impacted me not getting a job, **but this is something that is very hard to prove and point out.** I think this issue is one of the most difficult to prove when it comes to racist structures; there always seems to be “some other reason”, when there really isn’t.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

*“... here [ed. in Finland] you cannot go and get a job without knowing the language. If you don’t know the language by default nobody hires you. But in Romania, yes. You’re a Roma woman, you don’t have education, you don’t, you cannot work.” (Interview 1, Finland)*

*“It happened to me once. I went to ask for a job in a cleaning company. It seemed to me that the interview went well. They told me “we’ll let you know”, but they never called me. I thought they understood that I am a gypsy. They were racists and even if they did not understand that I am a gypsy, they certainly understood that I am a foreigner and that’s why they did not call me: you can see that I am a foreigner from the way I speak and also for my darker skin.” (Interview 17, Italy)*

## Getting fired

If belonging to the Roma community is so hard to detect during the recruitment process, racism is most easy to spot when it is a reason for job firing. Some of the experiences are also pointing to the difficulties that Roma women have to face even when accessing and trying to maintain a job, both in the formal and informal segments of the labor market. This is especially relevant when ethnicity and sexual identity intersect, the skin tone becoming a proxy for ethnic belonging. For example, as a lesbian white passing Roma woman, the probability to be identified as Roma or lesbian is small, as both identities are invisible. For the women interviewed, hiding Roma identity at a working place is a strategy to protect their jobs, to avoid jokes, differential treatment and labeling. Hiding becomes traumatic, especially in situations where something is missing from the working place and they could be blamed for it. Nevertheless, regardless of whether they choose to identify as Roma ethnic or to hide it, they still end up fired.



*“When I became aware of being Roma, I shared this at work, where I worked before: I was a company secretary for a photographer and, while talking, I said it, without thinking. I had already shared my homosexuality with my boss and colleagues, and they had taken it quite well. Thus, as they had taken it well, I thought: “Since they already know that I am homosexual, I will, at this point, tell them everything”. But I was wrong, because the fact that I was homosexual was ok for them, but they didn’t accept my Roma identity. Because of my Roma identity, they fired me, even though I didn’t have a contract there [she was working informally, ed.]” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*“I was working in a perfume shop, it was Christmas time, and a group of Roma stole things from the shop. I didn’t notice what was going on, because I was serving other people. On the contrary, the owners noticed what happened when the girls were already escaping. I obviously felt a lot of shame and I knew that the owners had hypothesized a link between me and these Roma women who had stolen, because they knew, however, that I was Roma. A few days later, the owner of the perfumery saw my mother at the bus stop and asked her if she had a daughter named V. ... By the way, I look a lot like my mom ... but she said no, she denied, precisely to protect me. Anyway, they fired me. My family told me not to say, at work, that I am Roma, because, anytime, the owners and colleagues would always blame me for anything wrong.” (Interview 12, Italy)*

## The occupations of Roma women

### *Traditional occupation among Roma women*

Traditional Roma women occupations, such as florist, salesperson, manufacturing textiles, working with wood, animal skin, precious metals etc., are almost disappearing. We found only two cases of Roma women still involved in small commercial activities or in selling flowers. When it comes to Romania, experiences of working as day-laborer in agriculture are mentioned by Roma women, but none of those interviewed were performing such activities at the time when the



interviews were taken. This could be due to the context of COVID 19 pandemic, when interviews were collected.

*“I have my job that I have been doing for so many years [that of looking in the buckets for things to sell at flea markets, ed.]” (Interview 4, Italy)*

*“I work as a flower girl, I sell roses. I've been selling roses since I was 14. Even in the neighborhood where I work, in the center, people know me, in shops, in restaurants.” (Interview 17, Italy)*

*“I was treated in many ways there, hm, there, hm, many things that are [sighs] If you could not do the work, you had to lift those bags... one would curse at you, one would... talk badly. There were many things... We did not receive salaries. We received potatoes, beetroot...” (Interview 14, Finland about work experience back in Romania)*

Roma women employ different strategies in accessing the labor market, in order to avoid discrimination and to be able to provide for their families. Thus, we can find Roma women as self-employed, as activists within Roma NGOs or working informally.

### *Working as self-employed*

Roma women from Italy chose to be active on the labor market as self-employed and their strategy seems to be well adapted to the Italian business environment, supporting small initiatives/entrepreneurs.

*“I work independently, I am a small entrepreneur. I also collaborate with a company, selling products. The relationship with the people I collaborate with is excellent and I am not treated badly...I have worked mainly independently, as a small entrepreneur. Roma often prefer self-employment precisely for this reason, for fear of discrimination.” (Interview 2, Italy)*

*“I've never sent CVs anywhere because I've never been interested in working for someone.” (Interview 18, Italy)*





*“Gypsy jobs” (Working informally)*

Most of the work performed informally by Roma women involves looking in the bins, selling magazines at the crossroads, begging, selling at the flea markets, collecting plastic bottles and cans and reselling them. They are in fact at the margins of society, trying to find a way of living without starving their families. The types of activities that Roma women are performing in order to survive are the dimension of the failure of different subsystems of the European welfare states (a failure of social aid/minimum guaranteed income schemes, in countries such Romania, but also of immigration policies in some other cases). And some of the women, irrespective of how much they are struggling, are kept forever outside the safety nets of the societies in which they live, whether as natives or immigrants. Some of the informal activities performed at the margins of society are presented by Roma women as a strategy of differentiating from the racism of the gadge world, while some others as surviving strategies.

*“I’ve always done gypsy jobs, I’ve never asked for a job at the Gadge...I have always worked in the flea markets, because I always went looking in the bins”. (Interview 10, Italy)*

*“I have my job that I have been doing for so many years [that of looking in the buckets for things to sell at flea markets, ed.]” (Interview 4, Italy)*

*“... when I was younger while living at the orphanage. I don’t know... there were different people coming from outside the orphanage, people who built houses: “we have a day job for you to carry some AAC blocks and to prepare cement mortar.” This kind of job.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

*“I went abroad. I used to beg.” (Interview 18, Romania)*

*:[ed. I’m collecting] cans and sell [meaning that she returns the recyclable cans and bottles to the grocery stores to receive the deposit money from them]. We return them and take the money: five, ten euro, depending on what you can find... I beg sometimes.” (Interview 20, Finland)*

*“It’s without contract. With the magazine, you either make some or you don’t” (Interview 8, Finland)*





### *Working as an activist*

One of the most exciting working experiences that was shared by the Roma women interviewed in each of the countries is that of being activists for Roma rights. In fact, this is the only profession in which development and expectations are presented by Roma women as similar to building up a career. The profession of Roma rights' activist creates the perfect opportunity for Roma women to mix their care for families and communities, with their identities as well as with their knowledge acquired sometimes in spite of all prejudices. But being a Roma woman activist requires them to manage through all of their identities, when activating in communities, in the sexist environment some NGOs practice or when they face the racism, homophobia or classism of the world in which they struggle to have a voice. The experiences of Roma women activists point out to how invisible women's work and struggle are in their own communities, but also in the patriarchal or heteronormative discourses of the Roma civil society. Within this sphere, they feel reduced to silence by men who lead NGO's, due to their gender, sexual identity and, in some cases, even to ethnicity, due to the fact that non-Roma expertise is still considered more relevant and much better paid. This creates tensions and some of our respondents' distance themselves from such treatments, due to the high expectation that the NGO's leadership fails to achieve in respecting diversity.

*"... I felt disadvantaged as a Roma woman. And it didn't happen only once. ... Even in the NGO sector, I've collaborated with Roma NGOs where I felt that women don't have too much to say, even if they are brilliant women, intelligent, with so much potential, very brave. They are somehow placed in a corner, and I cannot do something like that. I rather have nothing to do with these things than to sit silently in a corner. I am not made for this. ... I don't want to get in any NGOs where there are also Roma men because there is no equality. (Interview 10, Romania)*

*"The desire to fight against discrimination develops from the life that one has had. .... I do activism on my own and also with another Roma. Moreover, I do activism with other associations, of which I am a member, and also within networks of associations. I am very dedicated to women's rights." (Interview 2, Italy)*



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



Romni

*“Many people don’t perceive my work as work and especially the people from the community.*

*Like, what are you doing? They see it as something... I don’t know, I feel that people don’t appreciate it that much. My mother also tells me, “You couldn’t find another job? You found a difficult job that eats your brain out every day” “ (Interview 20, Romania)*

*“...but due to racist attitudes I have left a permanent job myself, because I was not comfortable working there. It included stereotyping, disrespect etc. And this was in an organization which is working for equality. The racism was between the lines and sometimes bluntly open. (Interview 2, Finland)*

*“(..)it seemed to me that even in the Roma civil society, although ... we have such a double standard - men who publicly state how cool feminists are, and that women should... But if you take a closer look, the management functions within Roma institutions and Roma NGOs belong to men. Only the feminist NGOs are still led by women, but otherwise, if we do an analysis, we’ll see that the men are in charge. Let’s do a test now - let’s invite Roma women as speakers or different women at least. There are enough women to be put on the list, but I didn’t find any. I want you to know that I felt left out because I was a woman. And to be perfectly honest, in Roma NGOs I also felt some differences between a Roma woman and a Romanian woman.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

## Being paid less

Roma women that succeeded in accessing the labor market and having a job are usually satisfied with their position (for which they worked a lot) and also with their working environment. But they still face unequal payment on the basis of their ethnic belonging, being asked to work out of conviction (“to work from the bottom of their heart”). The work of Roma women is sometimes undervalued both in gadje organizations, but also within the Roma NGOs, which reveals the multiple disadvantages they face when entering highly competitive positions on the labor market.



*“I have been paid much less than other people in my position (two payment levels less), due to my ethnicity – I had the highest education in the team and the smallest salary. I found this out by talking to my colleagues and hearing their salaries. In the discussion it was brought up that it had to do with my ethnicity.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

*“I don’t know. I didn’t think about it. I couldn’t do this think at work because I was there, and the situation would not have been resolved anyway. These wage differences will continue to exist until forever... I don’t think I was in a position to change this. I’ve managed to change other things, but not this one, because it’s not my decision.” (Interview 1, Romania)*

#### Patterns of disadvantage and discrimination on the labor market

In order to reinforce and validate the findings of our qualitative analysis, we ran multiple correspondence analysis, with the aim to show the pattern of association between different characteristics of a certain phenomenon.

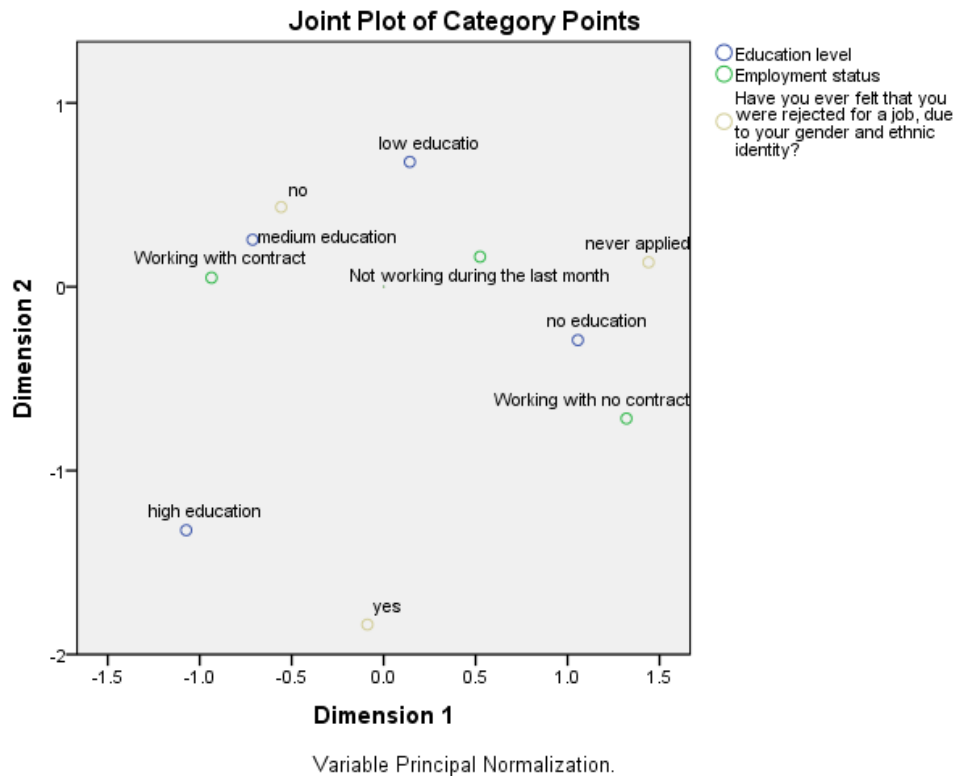
The figure below evidences that there are strong patterns of association between experiences of discrimination in accessing labor market, educational level and employment status.

Women with no education are more likely to be found as informal workers or inactive on the labor market and they are more likely to be discouraged from entering the labor market, never applying for a job.

Women with low and medium education have access to jobs under working contracts and it is more likely that they cannot identify a situation of discrimination in accessing the labor market.

Meanwhile, women identifying patterns of discrimination when accessing the labor market are most likely to be Roma women with high education levels.

**Figure 8. Correspondence analyses between the incidence of discrimination when accessing the labor market, educational level and employment status**



## Conclusions

As traditional Roma women occupations are almost disappearing, women are more engaged in working in shops, selling magazines, looking in bins, begging, selling at flea markets, collecting plastic bottles and cans, re-selling. Activists for human rights appear in the research as a job opportunity for women to combine family care and community with their identities and experiences gained within their lives. Even if they talk about satisfactions gained within their work, when it comes to different issues such as sexual identity, there is still not a safe space for them to be respected and acknowledged.



Working informally or in supporting the family in its economic activities are significantly mentioned by women with no level of education who never applied for a job. As there is a transgenerational pattern of discouragement and lack of access to the labor market, the traditional allocation of gender roles burdens women both with the domestic housework, but also with the need to provide for their families, involving themselves mainly in informal activities.

Domestic work is also supported by their daughters especially when there is no infrastructure such as water or a sewage system. In the lack of a model to reconcile work and family tasks, women feel just more burden to do household work and to seek financial resources.

As an indicator of the level of discouragement in accessing the labor market, within our research only 13 Roma women out of the total of 62 interviewed were looking for a job. Racism remains one of the reasons for discouragement for job searching, well hidden behind low levels of education or skills.

Accessing the labor market is sometimes questioned by women, especially by those with low levels of education who have abilities for different jobs but don't understand why language skills are relevant for cleaning for example. Accessing the labor market is more difficult for women with a dark skin tone, if they have a residence in a camp or a Roma neighborhood or if they have a Romani name (such as in Finland and Italy cases). Level of skills in the case of those with low level of education, migrants, minority groups, refugees or transgender women are sometimes not considered due to different standards of societies. That is why most of the time they are kept out of the safety nets of the societies they live in as migrants, Roma or transgender. The informal jobs they performed show their marginality but also their coping strategy in the face of racism. Many of the women interviewed work either in informal jobs or independently as to keep distance from the "gadje world" where their interaction has been traumatic.

At the working place, white passing Roma women and lesbians tend to hide their identity and some of their shared experiences show how it's a coping strategy to avoid jokes, labels, accusations of stealing and to protect their jobs. In this situation there are more likely to be found women with higher levels of education. Many times, they accuse they are less paid and are given less importance in comparison with non-Roma women or to Roma men.



Without doubt education is an important indicator for accessing labor market, for a better job and a life change but as we could read from women's stories, regardless of their level of education, the treatment they receive when working or the coping strategies they have to adapt in order to keep their jobs, clearly emphasize the idea that educational level will not stop racist attitudes but it is rather a systematic problem where lack of clear mechanism to access, include and respect diversity on the labor market are concepts unaddressed, unsanctioned and perpetuated.



## 8. REPORTING DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Even if they experience discrimination in education, health, housing and employment, Roma women rarely make their aggressors responsible for their actions. When they decide to act, they usually report acts of aggression that happened in the public sphere, such as bars, restaurants, streets, etc.

Only 10 out of the 62 Roma women that were interviewed for this study reported their experiences to the police and only 2 of the incidents reported were solved until the time of the interview, both in favor of the Roma women. The low number of successful petitions, as well as the racist and homo-trans-phobia they receive, are possible explanations for the low number of complaints.

Nevertheless, fearing both the aggressors and police also discourages women in reporting and finalizing their actions in reclaiming discrimination. After filling the complaint, the petitioner has no protection within her community, being even more exposed to other aggressions.

*“I’ve never done this. I cannot report the Roma who live here in the camp because, if they find out, they become even more evil.” (Interview 1, Italy)*

*“As I told you, I reported that far-right person who threatened me with death, but then to protect my son I withdraw the complaint. And he had stopped anyway.” (Interview 11, Italy)*

Most of the Roma women just do not think of reporting those who insult or harass them, because ignoring this type of behavior was what they’ve done for their entire life, and even through generations. The long track record of discriminatory treatment leads to distrust of many norms and institutions, including the justice system. Also, the trust in the police capacity to believe them and





to protect their interests is very low, sometimes non-existent. This is reinforced by stories of police abuse against Roma/LGBT that they hear within the communities, neighborhood, family or from the media.

*“No, I’ve never tried. ... I have never thought of reporting those who verbally assault me, I ignore them. In general, Roma do not really trust the police.” (Interview 20, Italy)*

*“Because I’m scared of the police when I see them like that in their uniforms, I’m very scared. Especially when they pass by with their car I’m scared.” (Interview 3, Finland)*

*God forbids! Never! I don’t even want to think about it! I went there to get my IC card and they didn’t allow me to leave my hair down, so I can’t imagine they would help me with other cases.*

*We are nobody’s people in Romania. (Interview 2, Romania)*

Reporting discrimination asks for specific skills and resources, and the most vulnerable Roma women usually do not have access to them in order to ask for justice

*“I thought of reporting the discrimination suffered in the Romanian factory, but I didn’t have the money to do it: the owner of the factory was very powerful in that city and, therefore, I knew that, having no money, I would never win.” (Interview 15, Italy)*

*“Because I never thought of it, you can imagine, going to pay for a lawyer or to, there’s no point, there’s no point.” (Interview 1, Finland)*

*“I have had a couple of events of reporting discrimination or criminal actions towards myself, and the people committing this discrimination have been both Roma and majority Finns. When you are a minority among a minority, you can end up being hurt by both, the majority and the minority. I am lucky in the sense that I am very aware of the law and the procedures of complaints / reports, so I did not need any legal advice for it.” (Interview 2, Finland)*

Distrust and fear of police due to lesbo-trans-phobia is also present in interviews, as Roma lesbians and transgender and most of the respondents preferred not to report violence or acts of discrimination. Even if they have the skills to report it, they would rather adopt coping strategies or try to blend into society, to be as invisible as possible if they are white passing. This does not



mean that they choose, but rather protect themselves from more discriminatory treatments as they are constantly targeted. Thus, in aggravated situations they report violence but the need to have a legal representation is important in overcoming the barrier in communication with the police or justice system.

*“I see that the police is very ignorant regarding Roma and homosexual identity. It can also happen that they laugh at you.” (Interview 13, Italy)*

*” I made a complaint because I was slapped, insulted and so on, and at this moment, the complaint I’ve made is pending. I also have some ...[NGO] lawyers helping me, otherwise I would not have afforded it. And when you have some lawyers by your side, you know they are there for you, you know they’ll help you, you have more confidence in yourself.” (Interview 5, Romania)*

For immigrant women, the lack of language skills is one of the most important obstacles in reporting discrimination. The sense of not belonging to the country that they live in makes them feel illegitimate to complain against natives.

*“Why to complain, it’s their country after all, it’s not my country [laughs]. Why would I go and report Finnish people? When it’s your country you do what you want. It’s their countries, they have rights, we have less.” (Interview 5, Finland)*

*“I thought about it, but then I said, we are... we don’t speak their language, they have other rights and they can speak, maybe I say something and they interpret it as something else and no. Because it wasn’t very serious violence to him, me or my children, something to prove. That he picked on me... any person can come and pick on you, but how do you prove it? But I said no. It was not necessary. (Interview 11, Finland)*

Reporting aggressions within their Roma communities and families implies reinforcing the majority’s stereotypes with respect to Roma communities and it is not perceived as a self-defense act, but against the community’ interest. Also, Roma families rely on the men’s income, as they are the breadwinners in the family, thus reporting them makes their family and children even more vulnerable to poverty.



Deaconess Foundation



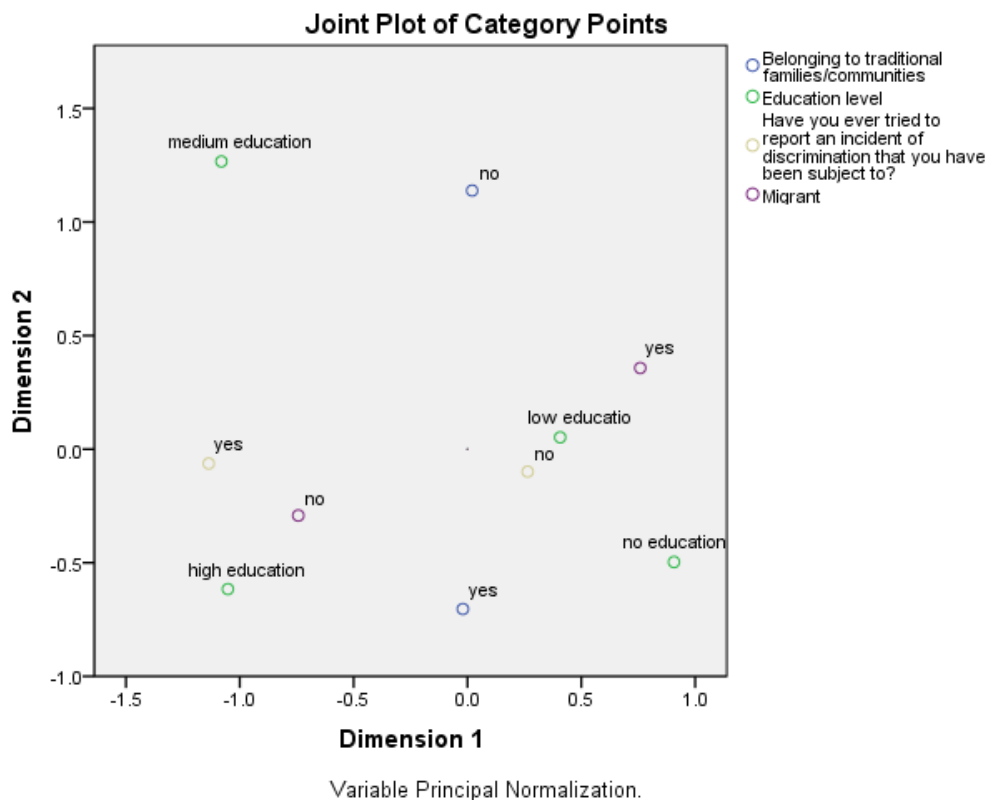
Center for Not-for-profit Law



*“I’ve never done anything because the Roma community is very... How can you say that your husband is beating you, oh my, don’t know what, you are bringing shame in the community or in the world? These things are completely [sighs] crazy. I did not talk to anyone, you can imagine, because there was nobody I could talk with. I was in his family, it was his mother, his sisters. So it was something offensive talking about it, so... I would not have gained anything anyway [sighs] (Interview 1, Finland)*

Next, we analyzed some of the dimensions identified by respondents as keeping them from exposing incidents of discrimination against Roma women. Belonging to Roma families was introduced in the analyses as a proxy for visibility as Roma women in the public sphere, the higher the visibility, the higher the probability of being targeted by different types of daily discrimination.

**Figure 9. Multiple correspondence analyses between the practice of reporting discrimination, migrant status, educational level and belonging to traditional families.**





As we can see in the figure above, native Roma women and with high education have the highest probability of filling a complaint to the police or other public authorities. On the other hand, migrant Roma women with no or less education most probably will not report their experiences in order to seek justice. Irrespective of how discrimination or intersectional discrimination is operationalized by the legal procedures, the system is so biased, bureaucratic and elitist in itself and so less not designed to serve the interest of the most vulnerable, that significant changes are not to be expected.

## Conclusions

Within this chapter we wanted to understand how women involved in our research address the justice system when they face an abuse, violence situation, discriminatory act or hate speech. Thus, most women reveal experiences of harassment, bullying, domestic violence, racist acts in public spaces, lesbo-transphobia. But only 10 out of 62 filed a complaint with the police and just 2 of them had favorable responses when the interview happened. Police are mentioned by most of our respondents as being distrusted, racist, abusive with women having low social status and dark skin. Police abuse is even higher when it comes to Roma transgender women or to undocumented migrants and only one of our respondents hired a lawyer to solve complain as she was afraid to communicate directly with police. Fear and distrust is also present in interviews with Roma lesbians and even if most of them have the skills to report, they prefer to adopt coping strategies, to be invisible where possible.

As said, reporting discrimination or different abuses need skills and resources and most of the vulnerable women involved in our research never considered to file a complaint. Language and writing are for immigrant women one of the most important obstacles for reporting, doubled by the lack of legitimacy to act against natives as it is their country and “right” to act abusive. Also reporting aggression within the Roma communities and families are most often not considered due to stigma associated with being Roma as well as acting against the communities’/families’ interest. In situations where women reported (mostly with medium and higher education), they had no



protection within their community, being exposed to more aggressions, pressures and interactions with the family's aggressor or even the aggressor. The police in all situations had no mechanism and will to protect the Roma women who reported and therefore in some situations women withdrew their complaints.

The problem is the system is not adapted to the needs and problems of the most vulnerable women, having low levels of education, low social status, undocumented residence or different gender identity. The lower the level of education, the higher the chances to report cases of violence, abuse or discrimination.

Also, within our research we saw that there is a higher probability for Roma women with low level of education and multiple vulnerabilities including gender identity to encounter daily microaggressions, harassments, violence on the street, at working places, in accessing health care or housing. As said before, the system is so biased, bureaucratic, elitist and designed to leave out the most vulnerable groups that significantly are oppressed and mistreated.



## 9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building the research on the life experiences of Roma women, revealed a life of events, Roma women being discouraged in education, labor market, when accessing healthcare, when dealing with violence and that reporting discrimination can hardly determine achievements. In situations where they succeed, they become the “exception from the rule” and very rarely as institutionalized model.

Intersectionality continues to present challenges as the amount of work to unveil it is not easy, requires effort, understanding and sensitivity towards issues so that no experience is excluded. The research has treated all the experiences collected in an intersectional key, included all dimensions and contexts, and avoided treating uni-dimensional categories. Structural problems are not solved as long as they reproduce racism, sexism, classism and homophobia.

Maybe the most relevant space where Roma girls find out for the first time that being Roma is “wrong” is school. Since early stages, racism intersects with socio-economic background and citizenship in shaping different experiences among Roma girls as pupils. And racism can influence Roma girls` decision to continue education or to dropout early, depending on their family and community context, and nonetheless according to the national context. Roma girls from Romania, one of the Eastern European countries characterized by the highest inequalities in the education system, have the highest probability of dropping out of school before finishing compulsory education or acquiring a minimum qualification.

One of the most important difficulties in analyzing intersectional discrimination in the educational system is the fact that the different treatment sometimes consists in ignoring and treating Roma girls with indifference. But as shown within the research, the discriminatory and



violent treatment they receive from teachers is perpetuated by classmates, in the absence of sanctions. The indifference and lack of adequate support for education add to the low level of education and sometimes even illiteracy of their parents.

Both discrimination and harassment are recounted as traumatic and shameful by Roma girls, but where discrimination was caused by teachers, it was also more likely to have Roma girls harassed by other classmates or pupils. They are experienced more by those who define themselves as having a darker skin tone.

Dropping out of school at early ages appears in Roma women experiences, as a consequence of structural inequalities that reproduce racism and classism and creates unsafe spaces for Roma girls. As long as teachers fail to create an environment open to diversity and respect for social status, the school will continue to exclude Roma girls and LGBT+.

For most of the respondents as they live either in informal settlements, camps and less often in different neighborhoods, housing situation affects all their lives from social relations to access to social services, job etc. During the research one of the conclusions was that there is a clear association between living standard (safe house, water, electricity, roads, property rights etc.) in Roma settlements and living conditions in neighborhoods populated by non-Roma. As being pushed to live at the margin, the idea of getting out for security reasons, such as in the situation of Roma LGBT+ , social housing, renting or buying are not valid options as they are either not accessible due to strict criteria or are unaffordable.

When it comes to the experience of Roma women with the healthcare system, with the sole exception of the Romanian case, where racism and classism are pervasive, participants from Italy and Finland only mentioned experiences of waiting time, "the way they look" at Roma women. Migrant Roma women provide insightful experiences, the healthcare systems in Finland, for instance, trying to adapt to the needs of the most disadvantaged, even if small steps are being done.

In terms of access to the labor market, in the absence of a certain level of education or the language skills required by society, most of the Roma women cannot find a way of accessing the upper segment of the labor market (where labor contracts guarantee access to social security schemes). Depending on the national context, they could perform self-employed activities or



engage in different types of informal activities, such as looking in bins, collecting plastic bottles and cans, selling magazines, selling in flea markets, begging, etc. On the labor market, migrant Roma women without education and language skills will most likely continue to be excluded. Reinforcing respect for diversity, ethnicity at the workplace is needed, considering the experience they face when they are employed.

The level of education for which they are not adequately supported through their schooling years becomes a new stigma in the world of paid jobs, which prevents them from accessing quality employment, stable incomes and social benefits.

Even when they want to work, Roma women feel that they are denied work, sometimes due to the conservatory gender roles, but more often, due to stigmatization and marginalization in the gadjje world.

Reporting discrimination is not a matter of choice in most cases, due to the male, white dominated, bureaucratic, elitist and inaccessible system.

In the light of navigating through different spaces and struggling to build a future for themselves and their families, they rarely find safe spaces where they are not restricted to one or another identity.

The narratives of Roma women evoke a constant struggle with different types of oppressions within families, outside in the gadjje world and with themselves. And for the most vulnerable Roma women, they have to find a way to cope with racism, misogyny (both inside and outside the family) but also with classism or immigration rules. That is why our effort to collect experiences was even more challenging as they reflect on past, present and future. Placing them in these contexts does bring the knowledge that is much needed for social change and equality policies.





## References

- Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018) : Being Black in EU  
[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-being-black-in-the-eu\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-being-black-in-the-eu_en.pdf)
- Alcoff, L. (2005) *Latinos and the categories of race in Visible identities. Race, gender and the Self*, NY, Oxford University Press.
- Baker, D. (2015) "The Queer Gypsy" in Nothing about us without us? Roma participation in policy making and knowledge production, Journal of European Roma Rights Center. Retrieved from [http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf](http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf)
- Bițu, N. & Vincze, E. (2012) "Personal Encounters and Parallel Paths toward Romani Feminism" in *Sings* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Sep), pp. 44-46, The University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/665955>
- Braunholtz-Speight, T. (2008) Policy Responses to Discrimination and their Contribution to Tackling Chronic Poverty, Background Paper for the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.
- Brooks, E. (2015) "The importance of feminists and ,’halfies’" in Romani studies. New epistemological possibilities" in *Nothing about us without us? Roma participation in policy making and knowledge production*, Journal of European Roma Rights Center. Retrieved from [http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf](http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf)
- CECODHAS Housing Europe’s Observatory (2011), "Housing Europe Review 2012. The nuts and bolts of European social housing systems". Retrieved from <https://www.housingeurope.eu/resource-105/the-housing-europe-review-2012>
- Center for Intersectional Justice & European Network Against Racism (2020) Intersectional discrimination in Europe: relevance, challenges and ways forward. Retrieved from <https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/intersectionality-report-final-3.pdf>
- Chandra, K. (2006) "What is ethnic identity and does it matter?" in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9(1), 397-424. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.062404.170715>
- Cioaba, L.M. (2006) *Deportation to Transnistria. Testimonies*, publisher Neo Drom
- Costache, I. (2019) "Politics of difference: Roma as homo sacer in nationalist and racist discourse or why materialising stereotypes are harmful" in Dorobanțu, O. & Gheorghe C. (2019) *The Romanian problem. An analysis of the Romanian racism*. Hecate, p.13
- Costache, I. (2020) "The power of racism, its trauma, and the road to healing". DOR Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.dor.ro/racism-and-the-road-to-healing/>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color" in *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6), pp. 1241-1299



Doey, L., & Kurta, J. (2011). "Correspondence Analysis applied to psychological research. Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology", 7(1), 5-14. Retrieved from <http://www.tqmp.org/RegularArticles/vol07-1/p005/p005.pdf>

Dubow, E.F & Rubinlicht, M (2011) "Coping" in Encyclopedia of Adolescence, Publ. Elsevier. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-373951-3.00107-1>

Essed, P. (1990). *Everyday racism: Reports for women of two cultures*. Claremont: Hunter House.

Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory*. Newbury Park: Sage.

European Commission, Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (2014). *Special Eurobarometer 411. Patient Safety and Quality of Care*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_411\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_411_en.pdf)

Eurostat (2020a) *Healthcare expenditure statistics*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Healthcare\\_expenditure\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Healthcare_expenditure_statistics)

Eurostat (2020b) *Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

EWSI Editorial Team (2016), "Immigrant Housing in Europe: Overview". Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/intdossier/immigrant-housing-in-europe-overview>

Fearon, J. D. (1999) *What is identity (As we now see the world?)*, Stanford University. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>

Florea, I. & Dumitriu, M (2020) "Transformations of housing provision in Romania: Organizations of subtle violence" originally published in *LeftEast*. Retrieved from <https://bloculpentrulocuire.ro/2018/11/08/transformations-of-housing-provision-in-romania-organizations-of-subtle-violence/>

Fremlova, L. (2020) "LGBTIQ Roma and queer intersectionalities: the lived experiences of LGBTIQ Roma" in *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, Vo. 3 (1), pp. 371-388

Gheorghe, C. (2010) „Gender equality in public policies for roma” published in trimestrial rev. Social Assistance from Bucharest University

Gheorghe, C. (2020) "The distance between us. Repositioning roma feminist and queer strategies" in vol. QUEER. Critical thinking, political consciousness and cultural practices in Romania. Coord.Iancu, V.&Anemtoaicei, O. Hecate 202

Gheorghe, C. Vincze, E. & Mark, L. (2018) "Towards and antiracist feminism for social justice in Romania" in (Ed. Kocze, A., Zentai, V., Jovanovic, J., Vincze, E.) *The Romani Women's Movement. Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe*, Routledge: UK

Harding, S. (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press

Heljic, A. (2019) "Revoluția are loc aici, revoluția este romă, queer și feministă". Retrieved from: <https://revistaarta.ro/ro/revolutia-are-loc-aici-si-acum-revolutia-este-roma-queer-si-feminista/?fbclid=IwAR2O2bwzIyfn2wIx3kH5WfVc8vaBgt5y2DRtMP4IBnHgbhyNP7kg2rWQ41M>



- Hinton-Smith, T., Danvers, E. & Jovanovic, T. (2017) "Roma women's higher education participation: whose responsibility?", *Gender and Education*, 30 (7), 811-828, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2016.1274386
- Jenkins, P. (1997) *Rethinking Ethnicity: arguments and explorations*, Sage Publications Londra, p.127-285
- Jovanovic, J & Daroczi, A.D (2015) "Still missing intersectionality: the relevance of feminist methodology in the struggle for the rights of Roma studies" in Roma participation in policy making and knowledge production. Retrieved from [http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf](http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf)
- Keskimäki, I., Nykänen, E., Kuusio H. (2014) "Health care services for undocumented migrants in Finland". National Institute for Health and Welfare. Report 11/ 2014, Helsinki. Retrieved from [https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/114941/THL\\_RAP2014\\_011web.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/114941/THL_RAP2014_011web.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y) (summary available in English)
- Kocke, A. (2009) *Missing intersectionality. Race/ethnicity, gender and class in current research and policies on romani women in Europe*, Centre for Policy Studies, central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Retrieved from <http://archive.ceu.hu/sites/default/files/publications/cps-policy-study-missing-intersectionality-2009.pdf>
- Kocze, A. Zentai, V. Jovanovic, J. & Vincze, E. (2019) *The Romani Women's Movement Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe*, Publisher Routledge
- Kreisman D, Rangel MA. (2015) On the blurring of the color line: wages and employment for black males of different skin tones. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 97(1), pp. 1–13.
- Kurtic, V. (2013) *Dzuvljarke. Roma Lesbian Existence*, European Roma Rights Center
- Longino, H. (1990) *Subjects, power and knowledge: Description and prescription in feminist philosophies of science* in (Eds. L. Alcoff & E. Potter) *Feminist epistemologies*, New York: Routledge.
- Mark, L. (2010) Why I became a feminist. In Nevi Sara Kali. *Roma Women's Journal*. (02), pp. 97-105. Retrieved from <http://www.desire-ro.eu/wp-content/uploads/Nevi-Sara-Kali-nr2.pdf>
- McCall, Leslie (2005) "The complexity of intersectionality" in *Signs*, 30 (3), pp. 1771-1800.
- Mocanu, C. (ed.) (2007), *Discriminare multiplă în România*. Călărași, Agora Printing house
- Mocanu, C. Zamfir, A.M & Gheorghe, C. (2009) *Trade unions at the intersection of gender and ethnicity.*, AMM Design Cluj
- Mocanu, C. Gheorghe, C. & Zamfir, A.M. (2009) "Different Perspectives on the Reality: Working Roma Women in Nevi Sara Kali, *Roma women's Journal* , Publishing House of Foundation Desire
- Montse, S., Montse, Y., De Botton, L. & Kostic, R. (2013) "Communicative methodology of research with Minority Groups. The Roma Women's Movement in International Review of Qualitative Research , Univ. of Illinois Vol. 6, No 2 , p. 226-238. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/irqr.2013.6.2.226?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A8fd1b8f-en>
- OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>. Retrieved from [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2018-results-volume-ii\\_b5fd1b8f-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2018-results-volume-ii_b5fd1b8f-en)



- Oprea, A. (2009) *Intersectionality Backlash: A Romani Feminist's Response* Roma Rights, no. 2. [http://www.errc.org/en-research-and-advocacy-roma\\_details.php?page=3&article\\_id=3564](http://www.errc.org/en-research-and-advocacy-roma_details.php?page=3&article_id=3564)
- Phillips, D. (1995). "Correspondence analysis". *Social Research Update*, Issue 7. Retrieved from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU7.html>.
- Popa, R. (2009) *Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policies* in Nevi Sara Kali, Roma Women's Journal , Publishing House of Foundation Desire,
- Popa, R. (2015). 'A decade-long struggle for change: women's mobilization and domestic violence legal and policy reform in Romania in *Mobilizing for Policy Change : Women's Movements in Central and Eastern*,
- Reece, R.L. (2021)The Gender of Colorism: Understanding the Intersection of Skin Tone and Gender Inequality. *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy*, vol. 4, pp. 47–55
- Rodriguez, M.S. (2008) Perceived Discrimination: Multiple Measures and the Intersections of Race and Gender. *Journal of African American Studies*, vol.12, pp. 348–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-008-9054-5>
- Rostas, I. (2019) A task for Sisyphus. Why Europe's Roma Policies Fail. Central European University Press
- StatSoft, Inc. (2013). How To Analyze Simple Two-Way and Multi-Way Table, Correspondence Analysis. Electronic Statistics Textbook. Tulsa, OK: StatSoft. Retrieved from <http://www.statsoft.com/Textbook/Correspondence-Analysis>.
- Taylor-Gooby, P. (2012) "Equality, Rights and Social Justice" in (Eds. Alcock, P., May, M. & Wright, S.) *The Student's Companion to Social Policy*, Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Vincze,E & Zamfir, G.I Racialized housing unevenness in Cluj-Napoca under capitalist redevelopment, *City*, vol. 23(4-5), pp. 439-460
- Weiste Paakkanen, A., Castenada, A., Rask, S., Koponen, P., Mölsä, M., Maki-Opas, J. & Koskinen, S. (2013). "Migrant Health and Wellbeing Study (Maamu)", in *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 23 (1), <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckt124.116>. Retrieved from [https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/23/suppl\\_1/ckt124.116/2837851](https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/23/suppl_1/ckt124.116/2837851).

### Annex 1: Respondents` profile

Country	Interview number	Area of residence	Age	Level of education	Employment status during the last month	Speaking Romani	Living in segregated communities & camps	Civil status	Being mother	Being migrant	Belonging to LGBT+ Community
Finland	1	urban	39	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	yes	yes	no
Finland	2	urban	54	high education	Working with contract	no	no	single	no	no	yes
Finland	3	urban	35	no education	Not working	yes	yes	widow	yes	yes	no
Finland	5	rural	32	no education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	6	urban	39	no education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	7	urban	26	low education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	8	urban	28	no education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	9	urban	45	low education	Working with contract	no	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	10	urban	66	no education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	11	urban	33	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	12	urban	53	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	yes	yes	no
Finland	13	urban	24	medium education	Not working	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	14	urban	33	low education	Not working	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no

Finland	15	urban	31	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	16	urban	19	no education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	17	urban	29	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Finland	18	urban	36	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	yes	no	no
Finland	19	urban	48	low education	Not working	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	20	urban	50	no education	Not working	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	21	urban	35	low education	Not working	yes	no		yes	yes	no
Finland	22	urban	38	no education	Not working	no	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Finland	23	urban	23	low education	Not working	no	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	1	urban	69	no education	Not working	yes	yes	single	yes	yes	no
Italy	2	urban	38	medium education	Working with contract	yes	yes		no	no	no
Italy	3	urban	37	medium education	Working with contract	yes	yes	single	no	no	no
Italy	4	urban	56	no education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	5	rural	23	low education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Italy	6	urban	49	low education	Not working	yes	yes	widow	yes	yes	no
Italy	7	urban	53	no education	Not working	yes	yes	single	yes	yes	no
Italy	8	urban	23	medium education	Not working	yes	no	married / in partnership	no	no	no

Italy	9	urban	29	medium education	Working with contract	no	no	married / in partnership	no	yes	no
Italy	10	rural	54	low education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	11	urban	43	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Italy	12	urban	25	high education	Not working	no	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Italy	13	urban	30	medium education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	no	no	yes
Italy	14	urban	55	no education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Italy	15	urban	38	high education	Not working	yes	yes	single	no	yes	no
Italy	16	rural	42	low education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	17	urban	38	low education	Working with no contract	no	yes	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	18	urban	49	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	yes	no
Italy	19	urban	27	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	no	yes	no
Italy	20	urban	23	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	no	no	yes
Romania	1	urban	33	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	no	no	no
Romania	2	urban	30	medium education	Working with no contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	no	no	yes
Romania	3	urban	35	medium education	Working with contract	no	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	4	urban	27	low education	Working with contract	yes	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no





Romania	5	urban	28	medium education	Working with contract	no	no	single	no	no	yes
Romania	6	urban	26	low education	Working with contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	no	no	no
Romania	7	urban	39	low education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	8	urban	45	no education	Not working	yes	yes	single	yes	no	no
Romania	9	urban	41	low education	Not working	yes	yes	single	yes	no	no
Romania	10	urban	26	high education	Working with contract	no	no	married / in partnership	no	no	yes
Romania	11	rural	40	no education	Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	12	urban	32	no education	Not working	no	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	13	rural	32	low education	Working with contract	yes	yes	single	yes	no	no
Romania	14	rural	36	medium education	Working with contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	15	rural	46	medium education	Not working	no	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	16	rural	28	low education	Not working	yes	yes	single	yes	no	no
Romania	17	rural		low education	Working with no contract	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	18	rural	47		Not working	yes	yes	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	19	urban		low education	Not working	no	no	married / in partnership	yes	no	no
Romania	20	urban	26	high education	Working with contract	yes	no	single	no	no	no



## Annex 2: Respondents' profile by country

		<b>Italy</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Romania</b>
no of interviews		20	22	20
age	min	23	19	26
	max	69	66	47
	average	40,05	37,09	<b>34,5</b>
Age group	less than 35	7	10	10
	35-44	6	6	7
	45+	7	6	<b>3</b>
Level of education	none	4	<b>8</b>	4
	low	6	<b>10</b>	8
	medium	5	1	5
	high	5	3	3
Living in camps/illegal settlements		6	0	0
Living in compact communities		8	6	12
Living in social shelters		0	<b>7</b>	1
Employment	Working with contract	8	10	9
	working with no contract	4	2	2
	not working	8	10	9
Speaking Romani		17	18	14
Married		13	16	13
Mothers		11	<b>21</b>	14
Migrants		11	<b>19</b>	0
LGBT+		2	<b>1</b>	3
White passing		10	3	3

Note: highlighting in red was done in order to evidence differences in the structure of the final samples.



### Annex 3: Interview guidelines

*GDPR consent in compliance to Italy/Finland/Romania's specific.*

#### **Family and identity**

Please tell me about your family of origin and the community in which you grew up (both or only one parent of Roma origin, living with extended family, speaking Romani in family, wearing traditional clothes, Roma community/neighborhood etc.)? How many children were in the family?

Were any differences in how boys and girls were raised in your family?

*(applicable to those with migration history)* For how long are you established in Finland/Italy?

Are there other countries where you stayed before? Have you migrated to Italy/Finland from the beginning with your spouse and children, or you reunited at a later time?

How did your family speak to you about your Roma belonging when you were a child? And how did they speak about your identity? Have they told you that in some spaces it is “safe” or “unsafe” to talk about your identity? Is there any field (of work/family/friends etc.) where you don't talk about your identity?

What is the earliest memory you have on finding out about your Roma identity? Do you remember any moments or events when you felt or told as being different in your childhood due to your Roma identity? How you identify yourself: as brown skin, dark skin or almost white skin?

*(if applicable)* And now, how do you talk now to your children or other children in your extended family about being a Roma? Do you speak in Romani language with them? What changed for you in speaking open about Roma identity and why?

*(if applicable – only for LBT)* And how about your sexual orientation? How was your family speaking about the LGBT+ community during your childhood or adolescence? How about your group of friends or community? How did your family react when you opened up to them about your sexual/ gender identity? How is your relation to your family and to your community now? Do you know other LGBT+ in the Roma community? Do you believe that things could change in a better way for Roma LGBT+? How?



### **Perceived position in community and daily discrimination / different treatment**

How could you describe your daily experiences as a member of your neighborhood? How often and in which situations do you feel as being treated with less respect or ignored than other people? Do you consider that the services you usually receive poorer services in stores, restaurants or other places? How often and when do you feel that people don't trust you, that you are considered dishonest, or not as capable as other people? How often were you called names, insulted, threatened or harassed on the streets or in other public spaces? Do you think all these happened to you because you are a woman, a Roma or both?

How do you usually react to such situations? Whom do you speak to about these?

*(if applicable)* How do you speak to your children about these situations when they are experiencing the same?

### **Housing**

How could you describe your housing situation in your neighborhood? It is up to your family needs? Do you have access to utilities (water, electricity, roads, transportation, internet, etc.)? Were there improvements over the last years?

Do you have an ID with your house address? What kind of documents do you have for the house you live in (none, rent, your own, belonging to relatives/parents, use to free etc.)? *(if applicable)*

Did you ever apply for social housing? If No, why? If Yes, how were you treated by public authorities?

Coming from your neighborhood, did you ever felt as being treated differently, when going to school, social services, job application/ interviews etc.? If, Yes, can you give us one example?

Have you ever felt like hiding or lying about the neighborhood you are living in as to not be treated differently?

Did you ever have to leave or think about leaving a house or a neighborhood because neighbors made your life uncomfortable?

Have you ever felt like you were denied the right to rent or buy a house in a specific neighborhood due to your Roma identity?



## Education

*(to all)* What is your level of education? How about that of your parents or siblings? Did you feel as a child that your family had some specific expectations from you in terms of educational achievements? Are these expectations different from boys and girls?

*(if applicable)* How do you speak now to your children about their educational choices? What do you think is different now in education as compared to when you were a pupil?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* How could you characterize your schooling years? How were your relations to teachers and colleagues?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* Have you ever felt that your seating in classroom and group were influenced by your gender and ethnic identity? How about the attention you received from the teachers (type of attention – targeting or sanctioning rather than emphasizing results), the time dedicated to you (to explain, make sure you understand, to evaluate your knowledge)?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* Have you ever been discouraged, or contrary encouraged by a teacher or advisor from seeking higher education or a specific educational profile? Have you followed their recommendations?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* Have you ever been denied your right to access a scholarship? If Yes, By whom? How did they (school administration, public authorities, etc.) responded to your need of information or support?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* Do you have experiences of being harassed at school as a Roma girl / teenager? If Yes, can you tell us about one particular event that you consider the most relevant?

*(not applicable with women with no education)* Have you ever thought of dropping out of school due to the way you were treated? If Yes, when do you remember as having first thoughts of dropping out? How did you cope with these thoughts? Do you think that if you had been treated kinder at school you would have continued your education to the following level?

*(if she has no education)* Did you ever go to school? Why? If you went for a couple of months/weeks, why did you drop out?



*(if applicable)* What are your current experiences with school staff and teachers as a mother of a pupil? How do you explain to your child any potential different and unfair treatment he/she may encounter in school? Do you explain different to your boys than to your girls?

*(if applicable)* Do you think your children, especially your girl(s) are safe at school? If No, why? What do you do or plan to do in order to protect them?

### **Health and social services**

How do you generally evaluate the access to health services (hospitals, clinics, drugstores etc.) for you and other family members (children, dependents)? Are they accessible (the distance and transportation needed)? Are they affordable (in terms of costs)? How is the schedule, is it in accordance to your other responsibilities? Did these ever discourage you to search medical help if needed?

Do you have a family doctor? If No, why? If Yes, how is your relationship with the family doctor? Do you receive adequate information and consultations? How about regular controls/checkups and analyses? How hard is to have an appointment, if needed?

How frequent do you go to a specialist for (annual) routine controls? When was the last one? When did you do the last breast control or a pap test?

*(if applicable)* How frequently do you visit a medic for the health issues of your children?

*(to all)* Have you ever felt that you, or the child or other dependent you were accompanying, were treated inferior to other persons or superficially or even denied access to medical care? Have you ever had a negative or shameful experience in relation to a hospital or to medical staff? Please tell us shortly the story of the event! Are there any positive experiences in relation to medical staff?

*(if applicable, if more than one, talk about the last one)* How was your pregnancy? Did you feel you had sufficient medical assistance during pregnancy? Did you have any? How did the medical staff treat you during check-ups? Did you receive adequate information on the risks and following steps?

*(if applicable, if more than one, talk about the last one)* How was the birth? How did the medical staff treat you and our baby? Did you receive adequate information and support during hospitalization from the medical staff? Did you have a negative or shameful experience during



Deaconess  
Foundation



Center for  
Not-for-profit  
Law



your hospitalization for giving birth? Please tell us shortly the story of the event! Are there any positive experiences in relation to medical staff?

*(to all, except trans)* Did anyone speak to you about tubal ligation during doctor's appointment, for instance while you were pregnant or giving birth, but also during other visits to a gynecologist? Who and in which context? Who initiated the discussion? How did you feel?

### *Violence*

Has it ever happened to you to be attacked or physically assaulted based on your ethnic and gender identity? If Yes, who was the aggressor? Did anyone jump to help? Whom did you ask for help? What type of help have you received? Did you need medical care after the incident? How were you treated by the medical staff? Did you ever file a complaint at police? If No, Why?

How about incidents of violence within your family (partner, other relatives)? If Yes, do you want to speak to us about such events? *(only if she is safe to speak about domestic violence)* Who was/were the aggressor/s? What type of help have you received and from whom? Did you need medical care after the incident? Have you asked for medical care or medicines needed for healing? Whom did you speak to about the incident? How they reacted to your story? Did you ever file a complaint at police? *(to all)* Do you know what to do in case you ever experience domestic violence? *(Please provide minimum information on where to ask for help or support in case of domestic violence!!)*

### **Employment**

Did you feel, as a child or teenager, that your family had some specific expectations from you in terms of having a job? How did women in your family deal with being mothers and employees? Were expectations from you different or in line with community norm?

*(if applicable)* How do you speak now to your girls and boys about working and having a family in the same time?

Have you ever felt that you were rejected for a job, due to your gender and ethnic identity? Please describe a situation when you think that you were rejected for being a Roma woman!

Do you currently have a job? If Yes, by contract or informally? For how long have you been working for your current employer? What is your occupation? How is your relationship with your colleagues? Do you work in a team, or mostly individually? If you work in team, have you ever



felt as being treated differently? In which way (including lunch breaks, after work social activities)?

*(if having a job)* Have you ever felt that you were not given a promotion or the wage that you deserved based on your gender and ethnic identity? Please describe a situation when you think it happened in this way!

Also, have you ever felt that you were fired based on your gender and/or ethnic identity? Please describe a situation that you consider most relevant!

Or that you have been refused work under a labor contract, due to your gender and/or ethnic identity *(or sexual identity if applicable)*? Please describe a situation that you consider most relevant!

*(if not working)* Are you currently looking for a job? If Yes, for how long? Why do you think it is difficult to find one? If No, do you ever see yourself as looking for a job? Why/When?

### **Trying to report discrimination**

Do you know any NGO or informal group which is active in your community? Have they ever contacted you to provide information or support? If so, in which area: civil rights, housing, education, family planning, health, counseling, training, services to support you in finding a job etc.?

How about public services? In which area: housing, education, family planning, health, counseling, training, services to support you in finding a job etc.?

You told us about some situations when you felt as being treated differently. Have you ever tried to report an incident of discrimination that you have been subject to? If Yes, which one of those we have talked about? In this particular incident, do you think you were treated differently because you were a Roma, a woman or both? What was the process of reporting? How was the petition/reclamation solved? How difficult was for you to find legal advice? Did you receive any assistance in the process? From whom?

Do you remember a specific moment that changed your life (for better or worse)? Please share it with us!

**Thank you very much!**



**Socio-demographic information:**

Region: \_\_\_\_\_ Location of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Area of residence: 1. Urban 2. Rural

Age: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ (in years)

Education level: 1. No ed. 2. Low ed. 3. Medium ed. 4. High ed.

Employment: 1. Working during the last month with contract (including those on a leave) 2.

Working during the last month with no contract 3. Not working during the last month

Speaking Romani language: 1. Speaking 2. Not speaking

Belonging to traditional families/communities: 1. Yes 2. No

Living in ghettos, illegal settlements, camps: 1. Yes 2. No

Living in compact communities: 1. Yes 2. No

No. of years since married / in partnership: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ (in years) 8. Single 9. Widow

No of children: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Age of the youngest children: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

Is she a single mother? 1. Yes 2. No

Country of origin (if migration background): \_\_\_\_\_

No. of years in the destination country: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

Country/ies where you went to school: \_\_\_\_\_

Belonging to LBT community: 1. Yes 2. No

Having a disability: 1. Yes 2. No

Having a chronic illness: 1. Yes 2. No

**For the fieldworker:**

Type of interview: 1. Face-to-face 2. Online 3. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Where the interview was held: \_\_\_\_\_ (at the interviewee’s residence/home, close to her residence/home, on the street, at the office of an NGO/community service, etc.)

Language of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you appreciate the level of openness during the interview? Did it increase/ decrease during the interview, or did it remain the same?

What were the emotions you had during the interview?





What were your personal experience of multiple discrimination that you felt to share with the respondent?