SHADOW REPORT

WESTERN BALKANS

SERBIA

SHADOW REPORT

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1. INSTITUTIONAL SET UP

At its session held on 3 February 2022, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2030 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 23/22; hereinafter: the Strategy). On 8 September 2022, it adopted the Action Plan for the period 2022–2024 for the implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2030 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 105/22; hereinafter: the Action Plan).

In 2019, the Republic of Serbia signed the Poznań Declaration, thereby undertaking specific and measurable commitments in the areas of employment, education, housing, health, civil status, and the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism. These commitments are directly linked to the EU Roma Strategic Framework up to 2030 and constitute part of the benchmarks under Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights).

The authority responsible for proposing the Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan was the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (hereinafter: the Ministry), which is also primarily responsible for most of the measures and activities envisaged under the Action Plan. The Strategy stipulates that the Ministry shall collect data on the implementation of measures and activities and the achievement of the Strategy's objectives from the state authorities responsible for implementing specific measures and activities. In accordance with the law, the Ministry uses these data to prepare reports on the implementation of the Action Plan.

Financial resources for the implementation of the Action Plan were planned under the Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 110/21). The funds were "provided" within the budget sections of the competent ministries or other state authorities responsible for individual activities under the Action Plan. However, we were unable to identify these funds because they were not clearly and explicitly designated.

In 2026, based on an analysis conducted by the YUROM Center, we conclude that the official reports for 2023 and 2024 demonstrate a systemic failure to fulfil the commitments undertaken. Updated data are unavailable for most key indicators. The former Coordination Body of the Government of Serbia for monitoring and implementing the Action Plan and the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma, now operating under the new name "Coordination Body for Improving the Position of Roma Men and Women" and established in 2025, does not meet or function, even though its Rules of Procedure stipulate that it should meet every six months.

The implementation of the measures and activities contained in these documents, as well as any progress achieved, depends almost exclusively on donor-funded projects. At the local level, the situation is alarming: most municipalities have neither dedicated budgetary resources nor councils or mobile teams for Roma inclusion.

Serbia is not only demonstrating delays in implementation but is also knowingly failing to fulfil the international commitments that it has undertaken under the Poznań Declaration. This directly affects the assessment of the country's progress in the European Union accession process.

This shadow report was prepared on the basis of a document issued by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue of the Republic of Serbia, as well as incomplete and insufficiently reliable data received from individual competent ministries in response to requests submitted under the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance.

Funding from donor resources was envisaged for most individual activities. In this regard, and pursuant to Article 58, paragraph 1, item 4, indent 3 of the Regulation on the Methodology of Public Policy Management, Public Policy and Regulatory Impact Assessment, and the Content of Individual Public Policy Documents

("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 8/19), the implementation of such measures was conditional upon the availability of donor funding.

In accordance with the Strategy and the Action Plan, in January 2025 the Ministry distributed reporting templates to all institutions responsible for measures and activities whose implementation was envisaged under the Action Plan for 2024. The report was completed in April 2025, within the legally prescribed deadline. It should be noted that the Ministry entered all submitted data into the Unified Information System for Public Policy Planning, Implementation Monitoring, Coordination and Reporting (UIS).

Although the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights requested data on the activities implemented, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure did not submit its contribution in full.

Based on the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue's *2024 Report on the Implementation of Activities under the 2022–2024 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2030*, available here, and on the responses received from other competent ministries, we present our assessment in the form of a shadow report.

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND MINORITY RIGHTS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue is responsible for coordinating activities and reporting on the Strategy and the Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma. The document forming the basis of this report is the *2024 Report on the Implementation of Activities under the 2022–2024 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2030*, available at the following link.

The central institutional unit responsible for planning and implementing Roma-related policies is located within the Ministry's Sector for Anti-Discrimination Policy and the Advancement of Gender Equality. The Sector performs tasks related to:

- promoting and developing anti-discrimination policies and gender equality, as well as improving the position of Roma men and women;
- identifying and designing measures and activities aimed at monitoring and analysing the situation and proposing measures in the areas of gender equality, protection against discrimination of persons belonging to groups at particular risk of discrimination, and improvement of the position of Roma men and women;
- drafting laws, other regulations and public policy documents in the areas of gender equality, anti-discrimination and improvement of the position of Roma men and women;
- preparing regular and periodic reports as part of monitoring the implementation of public policy documents falling within the Sector's competence;
- supporting associations working to protect groups at particular risk of discrimination;
- cooperating on and supporting relevant projects; and
- performing other tasks falling within the Sector's remit.

The internal unit directly responsible for Roma-related matters is the Department for the Advancement of the Position of Roma, which employs two Roma persons.

COORDINATION BODY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SERBIA FOR IMPROVING THE POSITION OF ROMA MEN AND WOMEN

The Coordination Body was established by a decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 11 September 2025. At the national level, it monitors all processes related to the social inclusion of Roma men and women and coordinates the work of state administration bodies, local self-government units, public enterprises and other stakeholders active in this field.

Its mandate also includes improving intersectoral cooperation, issuing recommendations for responses to urgent situations that could further increase the vulnerability of Roma men and women, and proposing ways to implement both prescribed and additional measures contributing to their social inclusion.

The Coordination Body is chaired by the Prime Minister, while the Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue serves as its Deputy Chair. Its members include:

- the Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure;
- the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government;
- the Minister of Education;
- the Minister of Health;
- the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs;

- the Minister of Family Welfare and Demography;
- the Minister of Culture;
- the Minister without Portfolio responsible for gender equality, the prevention of violence against women, and the economic and political empowerment of women;
- the Commissioner of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration; and
- the President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority.

The Coordination Body of the Government of Serbia, which was supposed to coordinate the implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan, did not exist between 2022 and October 2025, when the YUROM Center contacted the Ministry and the Prime Minister of Serbia and requested its establishment. Its previous composition had last met in 2021.

According to the Coordination Body's Rules of Procedure, there is also a so-called "Platform of Roma NGOs," which meets as necessary, although meetings should be held once every six months.

In our assessment, the expert group functions as a "phantom body," while the Civil Society Platform for Roma predominantly includes organisations supportive of the current government and lacking a critical approach. This represents the principal systemic blockage that has left dozens of key activities - including legislative amendments, the establishment of a Roma Fund and the preparation of analyses—classified as either "ongoing" or "not initiated," as demonstrated by the Ministry's report.

Institution/mechanism	Composition or responsible unit	Main responsibilities	Functioning and identified shortcomings
Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue	Sector for Anti-Discrimination Policy and the Advancement of Gender Equality	Coordinates implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan; collects data from responsible institutions; monitors implementation; prepares official reports; drafts policies and regulations	Coordination and reporting are weakened by incomplete and insufficiently reliable information submitted by responsible ministries
Department for the Advancement of the Position of Roma	Internal unit within the Ministry; employs two Roma women	Directly manages Roma-related matters; supports policy development, monitoring, reporting and coordination	Very limited staffing in relation to the scope of its responsibilities
Coordination Body for Improving the Position of Roma Men and Women	Chaired by the Prime Minister; Deputy Chair is the Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue; includes relevant ministers and other national institutions	Coordinates national and local institutions; improves intersectoral cooperation; monitors Roma inclusion processes; proposes measures and responses to urgent situations	The previous body last met in 2021. The mechanism was absent between 2022 and 2025 and, following its re-establishment in September 2025, remained largely non-functional
Expert Group of the Coordination Body	Representatives and experts expected to provide technical and operational support	Supports the Coordination Body and contributes to the implementation and monitoring of policies	Assessed by YUROM Center as a “phantom body” because there is no evidence of meaningful or continuous functioning
Civil Society Platform for Roma / Platform of Roma NGOs	Roma and other civil society organisations	Enables civil society participation and consultation in the implementation and monitoring of Roma inclusion policies	Meetings are irregular, although they should be held every six months. Its membership predominantly includes organisations perceived as close to the government, limiting independent and critical participation
Competent line ministries	Ministries responsible for education, employment, housing, health, social protection, culture and other relevant areas	Implement sector-specific measures and submit implementation data to the coordinating Ministry	Reporting is incomplete and inconsistent. The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure did not submit its complete contribution for the 2024 report

Local self-government units	Municipal authorities, local councils and mobile teams for Roma inclusion	Implement Roma inclusion measures at the local level and respond to the needs of Roma communities	Most municipalities lack dedicated budgets, councils and operational mobile teams, making local implementation heavily dependent on donor-funded projects

2. BUDGETARY RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

In February 2022, the Government of Serbia adopted the third revised Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma, which is to be implemented until 2030. The current Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma was adopted in 2025.

This document should be aligned with the *Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process*, commonly known as the Poznań Declaration. The Declaration was adopted in 2019 by the prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries and sets ambitious minimum objectives that the signatory countries should achieve before joining the European Union.

By signing the Poznań Declaration, Serbia committed itself to "use and increase the budget at central and local levels so that it reaches the Roma community," with the aim of achieving the full social inclusion of Roma. Other elements introduced into the national strategic framework through the Declaration are also important. These include an emphasis on formulating evidence-based Roma inclusion policies and establishing appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on policy implementation, including the comparison of baseline and achieved values on an annual basis.

For several years, the European Commission has also stressed the need for Serbia to strengthen its mechanisms for budgeting Roma-targeted policies, most recently in its annual report published in November 2023.

Based on the Ministry's report on the implementation of the Action Plan in 2024, we identify several key factors that, according to our analysis, limit the ability of sound legislation and inclusive policies to produce tangible improvements in the quality of life of the Roma population:

a) Basic records concerning the Roma population remain unreliable, fragmented and methodologically inconsistent. The digital "database" is not a database in the proper sense but merely a collection of records, and it is not accessible to civil society organisations, despite our request for access;
b) There is no centralised mechanism for monitoring financial flows related to inclusion policies implemented by different national and local authorities;
c) No impact assessments are conducted, and the effects of implemented measures are not monitored through the quantitative indicators envisaged in the relevant planning documents.

Since there is no single budget line or account through which the allocation, expenditure and implementation of earmarked funds could be clearly monitored, our analysis relies on publicly available data from different sources. This limits the possibility of assessing how effectively the competent institutions implement Roma inclusion measures. Nevertheless, the available information supports the following conclusions:

- Public budgets have not been placed in the service of providing permanent and sustainable support to the Roma inclusion process.
- Information on budgets and the expenditure of allocated funds is not available to interested members of the public.
- Based on the data collected, budgetary allocations for improving the position of Roma vary among local self-government units. However, most local self-government units do not have funds specifically allocated for this purpose.
- A total of 85 local self-government units, or 62.96%, reported that they had no specifically allocated funds for improving the position of Roma in the current year.
- A total of 50 local self-government units, or 37.03%, reported that they had specifically allocated financial resources for improving the position of Roma in the current year.

- The YUROM Center also questions the reliability of these reported data because they are not supported by evidence. The principle of evidence-based Roma policymaking, referred to in the methodology for implementing the Poznań Declaration, is not being applied.
- If the implementation of Roma inclusion measures continues at the current pace, the ambitious objectives established by the Poznań Declaration and the 2022–2030 Strategy will not be achieved within the envisaged deadlines.
- The state relies primarily on project-based funding provided by organisations and donors such as GIZ, the EU and UNDP, while the regular state budget provides only symbolic allocations. This is clearly reflected in the report prepared by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue itself.

At the local level, the situation is critical:

- Local action plans exist in only 33.3% of the municipalities that responded to the relevant request, and even the reliability of this figure should be treated with caution.
- A Council for the Social Inclusion of Roma has been established in only 11.85% of municipalities. According to the information available to us, however, these bodies are largely non-functional.
- Mobile teams have been established in 36.3% of local self-government units, but a budget for their operation has been provided in only eight municipalities, representing 6% of the total.

Roma-related policies are not treated as a budgetary priority at either the national or local level.

3. EDUCATION

Key education data

- Number of Roma pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary school in the 2024/2025 school year: **2,303**
- Number of Roma students enrolled in the first grade of secondary school in the 2024/2025 school year: **1,173**
- Number of Roma pupils who completed primary school in the 2023/2024 school year: **2,855**
- Number of Roma students who completed secondary school in the 2023/2024 school year: **925**
- Number of Roma men and women with higher education qualifications: **153**

Source: Social Inclusion Database

The priorities of the Ministry of Education of Serbia were:

a) preschool education and priority enrolment of Roma children in preschool institutions;
b) affirmative enrolment in primary schools and enrolment without personal documents;
c) the provision of free textbooks; and
d) affirmative action measures for enrolment in secondary schools.

Preschool education

The participation of Roma children under the age of five in preschool education has increased. Currently, 80% of Roma children attend the compulsory Preparatory Preschool Programme, while 85.4% enrol in primary school. The dropout rate has decreased by seven percentage points. In addition, 27% of Roma girls

enrol in secondary education, representing an increase of 12 percentage points compared with the enrolment rate recorded in 2014.

Key education indicators for Roma in Serbia

Indicator	Figure	School year/reference period
Roma pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary school	2,303	2024/2025
Roma students enrolled in the first grade of secondary school	1,173	2024/2025
Roma pupils who completed primary school	2,855	2023/2024
Roma students who completed secondary school	925	2023/2024
Roma men and women with higher education qualifications	153	Latest available data
Roma children attending the compulsory Preparatory Preschool Programme	80%	Latest available data
Roma children enrolling in primary school	85.4%	Latest available data
Roma girls enrolling in secondary education	27%	Latest available data
Reduction in the dropout rate	7 percentage points	Comparison period not specified

Source: Social Inclusion Database Serbia and Ministry of Education data.

Pedagogical assistants

Pedagogical assistants constitute an important support measure. There are currently 280 pedagogical assistants working within the education system. Expanding their network and supporting their continued professional development remain ongoing responsibilities of the Ministry.

A particular challenge is increasing the number of pedagogical assistants in secondary schools, where only 10 are currently employed.

Scholarships for secondary-school students

In 2024, a total of 1,578 Roma students benefited from affirmative action measures through an increase in their admission scores. Their scores were increased by 30% of the difference between the points they had obtained and the maximum of 100 points.

For Roma students whose families were also recipients of financial social assistance, the score was increased by 35%. A total of 924 students met this condition.

The monthly student scholarship amounts to RSD 8,100 and is paid in 10 equal monthly instalments.

Affirmative action measures for the enrolment of Roma students in secondary schools are regulated by a bylaw. In the 2022/2023 school year, 2,451 Roma students were enrolled through these measures, of whom 52% were girls.

In the 2023/2024 school year, 2,511 Roma students—1,356 boys and 1,155 girls—were enrolled in the first grade of secondary school through affirmative action measures. Since 2005, more than 20,500 Roma students have been enrolled through these measures.

Over the past 10 years, approximately 10,000 scholarships have been awarded to Roma secondary-school students as an important incentive and support measure.

The Ministry's call for student scholarships for the 2025/2026 school year is currently open. These scholarships are financed from the budget of the Ministry of Education. Students from vulnerable social groups, including members of the Roma national minority, are ranked separately according to less restrictive eligibility criteria.

Teaching Romani in primary schools

In addition to the above support measures, pupils have the opportunity to attend the elective programme *Romani Language with Elements of National Culture*. Between 2,500 and 3,000 primary-school pupils choose this programme each school year.

Romani is taught in 19 schools located in 19 cities. In our assessment, the programme could be introduced in approximately 50 additional cities and schools with sizeable Roma populations. We also believe that the opportunity to study Romani should be available to non-Roma children.

Discrimination in schools

In 2016, the *Rulebook on Detailed Criteria for Recognising Forms of Discrimination by an Employee, Child, Pupil or Third Party in an Education Institution* was adopted. This was followed in 2018 by the *Rulebook on the Conduct of Institutions in Cases of Suspected or Established Discriminatory Behaviour and Conduct Undermining the Reputation, Honour or Dignity of a Person*.

Both rulebooks regulate in detail the elements for identifying discrimination, including segregation in education, and establish procedures to be followed by educational institutions in cases of suspected or confirmed discriminatory conduct.

In accordance with these documents, all education institutions have established a Team for Protection against Discrimination, Violence, Abuse and Neglect. Based on an analysis of each institution's situation and needs, these teams prepare and implement prevention and intervention programmes for every school year.

Between 2021 and 2024, the Ministry of Education received 24 notifications concerning discriminatory conduct among pupils. In most cases—19 out of 24—the reported personal characteristic forming the basis of discrimination was national minority affiliation.

Individual protection plans were prepared for pupils who experienced discriminatory or violent conduct. Institutions are also required to conduct intensified educational work with the entire class and strengthen their preventive activities.

Segregation

It is impossible to discuss discrimination in education without addressing segregation. Segregation represents another significant challenge because it perpetuates marginalisation and can negatively affect social cohesion and empathy.

Schools implement a range of preventive measures to avoid segregation. Where segregation is established—namely, where Roma pupils account for more than 25% of the total number of pupils in a group, class or institution—the institution is required to implement appropriate measures under a desegregation plan.

The desegregation plan contains measures implemented jointly by the institution's employees, the competent school administration and representatives of the local self-government unit responsible for education.

As part of prevention efforts, more than 900 education professionals have strengthened their knowledge and skills concerning the application of the bylaws governing the identification of and response to discrimination.

Education professionals also have access to five training programmes specifically addressing support for Roma pupils and the improvement of education professionals' competencies in combating discrimination.

The Ministry of Education's website also provides resources intended to strengthen education professionals' capacities to prevent and respond to discrimination. These materials were developed through cooperation between the Ministry and civil society organisations, with the support of international donors, and include:

- *Guide to Preventing and Responding to Discrimination for Employees of Education Institutions: From Recognition to Action*;
- *Brochure for Parents: Prevention, Protection and Response in Cases of Discrimination in Education*; and
- *Guide to Preventing Segregation in Education Institutions and Implementing Desegregation Measures*.

Support at the local level

The available data indicate that:

- Most municipalities provide support for primary education by allocating funds for textbooks, school meals and transport. Allocations for these purposes range from RSD 500,000 to RSD 8,000,000.
- The predominant focus is on inclusive support. Municipalities and cities generally do not allocate funds exclusively to Roma children; instead, support is formally provided to all pupils on an equal basis.
- Different funding models are applied. Considerable variation exists in both the methods of financing and the amounts allocated, reflecting differences in the approaches and financial capacities of local self-government units.
- Precise data on Roma children are lacking. In many cases, there are no accurate records of the number of Roma children using these services, making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness and reach of the measures.
- Of the 135 local self-government units that answered whether *Romani Language with Elements of National Culture* was taught as an elective programme in their primary schools, only 19 responded positively. The subject was not taught in the remaining 116 municipalities and cities.

4. EMPLOYMENT

Key data

- Only **319 Roma are employed in the public sector**, representing less than 0.1% of public-sector employees and falling far below their share of the total population.
- Approximately **27,000 Roma are registered with the National Employment Service (NES)**, although the available data are incomplete.
- There are no operational social enterprises or social cooperatives in Serbia, despite the existence of relevant legislation, a National Council for Social Entrepreneurship and dedicated budgetary resources that remain unused.
- In 2026, **566 young Roma men and women applied for self-employment grants**. This was the best result recorded during the 10 years in which the National Employment Service has published its annual call for applications.

The section of the official report addressing employment did not provide sufficient relevant information concerning the implementation of the Action Plan. Consequently, the following assessment is based on the YUROM Center's expert knowledge and extensive practical experience.

Current employment measures targeting Roma men and women

From a Roma perspective, active employment measures represent a combination of formal commitments and practical limitations that continue to keep Roma on the margins of the labour market.

These measures have not produced satisfactory results. Roma beneficiaries are generally limited to basic interventions such as functional literacy programmes, adult education and public works. More attractive opportunities—including traineeships, labour-market-oriented training and digital skills programmes—remain largely inaccessible because of low levels of formal education and systemic barriers.

This perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The Roma employment rate is estimated at approximately 21%, compared with a national average of 50–55%. Roma reportedly experience discrimination four times more frequently when seeking employment, while their representation in the public sector remains below 0.1%, despite the state's constitutional obligations.

A positive element is that the relevant action plans recognise Roma as a priority group. The available measures include motivational training, information about NES services, support packages for persons facing multiple vulnerabilities, and entrepreneurship support accompanied by mentoring. Another encouraging development is that 566 young Roma men and women applied for self-employment funding in 2026.

The Council of Europe project *Roma Integration – Phase III* (2023–2026) also supports the formalisation of Roma employment. However, the project has not provided direct financial investment to Roma beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, these measures remain far from sufficient. There are no dedicated budgets for Roma employment, resulting in pronounced dependence on donor funding. Eligibility criteria for entrepreneurship support are excessively demanding and insufficiently adapted to beneficiaries' circumstances. Roma are excluded from policy design and monitoring, while employers' prejudices continue to prevent their employment even where subsidies are available.

Furthermore, protection against discrimination is ineffective, including because free legal aid is insufficiently available. At the local level, there are no employment mediators or adequate outreach services targeting the NEET population—young people not in employment, education or training.

We support the continued implementation of employment measures but insist on greater Roma participation in policymaking, dedicated funding, stronger local mechanisms and effective sanctions for discrimination. Without these measures, Roma will remain dependent on forms of assistance that rarely produce sustainable change.

Prospects for achieving the 2030 employment targets

Serbia's prospects of achieving a 25% employment rate among Roma men and women by 2030—and representation in the public sector proportionate to the share of Roma in the general population—remain highly uncertain.

From a Roma perspective, the 25% employment target established by the 2022–2030 Strategy and the 2019 Poznań Declaration is ambitious but realistically difficult to achieve. At the beginning of 2026, the Roma employment rate was estimated at between 18% and 22%, compared with the national average of approximately 50.5% in 2025. The NEET rate among young Roma was particularly high, at an estimated 70–73%.

Achieving the 25% target by 2030 would require stable annual growth of between one and 1.5 percentage points. From a historical perspective, this would represent exceptionally rapid and substantial progress.

The reasons for this pessimistic assessment include:

- low levels of formal education, with most working-age Roma lacking recognised qualifications;
- deeply rooted prejudices among employers;
- limited previous work experience among candidates;
- the geographical isolation of Roma settlements from potential workplaces;
- high levels of employment discrimination, reportedly affecting between 34% and 60% of Roma jobseekers;
- weak implementation of employment measures, including dependence on donor funding and the failure to adapt programmes to local needs; and
- stagnation in the general labour market, with the employment rate decreasing from 51.9% in 2024 to 50.5% in 2025.

Roma representation in the public sector also remains critically low, estimated at between less than 0.1% and 0.5%, despite formal political support and frequent institutional discussions on the issue.

Measures proposed by Roma civil society organisations

Roma civil society organisations consider that the employment situation can only be changed through substantial reforms:

- **Large-scale investment in education and training:** Programmes should focus on contemporary, digital and labour-market-relevant skills.
- **Binding public-sector quotas:** Mandatory employment quotas should be introduced, accompanied by clear sanctions for institutions that fail to comply.
- **Effective action against discrimination:** Public campaigns should be implemented, and free legal aid should be made available to victims of discrimination.
- **A greater role for Roma organisations:** Roma civil society organisations should participate directly in designing and monitoring employment measures.

- **Dedicated funds and new employment sectors:** Special funds should be established, and employment opportunities should be created in recycling, social entrepreneurship and the green economy.

Without these urgent measures, the realistic projection is that the Roma employment rate will stagnate at between 20% and 23% by 2030. This would represent a direct failure of the Strategy, perpetuate the cycle of poverty and contribute to the further emigration of young Roma, accelerating the depopulation of entire Roma settlements.

Role of local self-government units

Local self-government units have an important role in increasing the employment rate of Roma men and women and represent the most realistic mechanism for achieving change on the ground.

Applying the principle of subsidiarity, their role is both essential and potentially transformative. As the institutions closest to Roma settlements, they can directly influence training programmes, the allocation of subsidies, partnerships with employers and outreach activities.

Local self-government units have the authority to:

- prepare local employment action plans;
- establish employment councils that include Roma representatives;
- finance targeted employment measures; and
- implement public works programmes in which Roma are identified as a priority group.

Although examples of good local practice exist, their current impact remains very limited because of:

- the absence of a systematic approach;
- weak cooperation with Roma civil society organisations;
- insufficient financial resources, with local budgets frequently prioritising elections and short-term political interests over long-term development; and
- low Roma participation in active labour market measures.

Employment mediators should be introduced, Roma participation in employment councils should become mandatory, additional resources should be allocated from the national budget, and a strict monitoring mechanism should be established. Without stronger local government capacities, the target of a 25% Roma employment rate will remain unattainable.

Principal barriers to Roma employment

- **Discrimination and employers' prejudices:** Between 34% and 60% of Roma reportedly experience discrimination when seeking employment. Antigypsyism remains deeply rooted in the labour market and prevents employment even when state subsidies are available.
- **Low levels of education and qualifications:** Approximately 87% of Roma registered with the NES are classified as persons without professional qualifications.
- **Structural exclusion and lack of work experience:** Roma settlements are frequently geographically distant from economic centres. Many Roma work in the informal economy or perform physically demanding jobs without an opportunity to acquire formally recognised work experience.

- **Limited effectiveness of active employment measures:** Programmes have low levels of local uptake, excessively demanding eligibility requirements, pronounced dependence on donor funding and no permanent systemic foundation.
- **Multiple discrimination against Roma women:** Roma women face disproportionate responsibility for household and childcare duties, additional labour-market barriers, and the effects of traditional practices and gender roles within the community.

Barrier	Key findings
Discrimination and employers' prejudices	Between 34% and 60% of Roma reportedly experience discrimination when seeking employment. Deeply rooted antigypsyism continues to restrict access to employment, including in cases where state subsidies are available.
Low levels of education and qualifications	Approximately 87% of Roma registered with the National Employment Service (NES) are classified as persons without professional qualifications.
Structural exclusion and lack of work experience	Many Roma settlements are geographically distant from economic centres and employment opportunities. Roma are frequently engaged in informal or physically demanding work that does not provide formally recognised work experience.
Limited effectiveness of active employment measures	Existing programmes have limited uptake at the local level, demanding eligibility requirements, considerable dependence on donor funding and no permanent systemic foundation.
Multiple discrimination against Roma women	Roma women face additional labour-market barriers due to unequal responsibility for household and childcare duties, as well as the effects of traditional practices and gender roles within the community.

Proposed Law on the Equal Employment of National Minority Members in Public Administration

The representation of members of the Roma national minority in the public administration and public sector should be increased through affirmative action measures.

Through its constitutional and legislative framework, the Republic of Serbia has undertaken to ensure the proportional representation of national minorities in public administration, state bodies and local self-government. Article 77 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia expressly guarantees national minority members the right to appropriate representation in public bodies, while Article 14 provides for special measures to ensure equality.

The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, adopted in 2002 and subsequently amended, expressly permits affirmative employment measures in the public sector. Such measures are not considered discriminatory when their purpose is to achieve appropriate representation. A similar obligation is established by Article 9 of the Law on Civil Servants, which requires the national composition of employees to reflect the structure of the population.

According to the 2022 Population Census, Roma account for approximately 1.98% of Serbia's population. The 2022–2030 Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women, the 2019 Poznań Declaration and the Action Plan envisage Roma representation of at least 2% in the public sector.

The actual situation, however, is dramatically less favourable. According to available data and estimates—including YUROM Center assessments from 2015 and 2023, European Commission reports from 2024 and 2025, and opinions of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National

Minorities—the proportion of Roma employed in public administration and state bodies is estimated at approximately 0.04% to less than 0.1%.

Updated official data on the ethnic composition of public-sector employees remain unavailable, preventing effective monitoring and evidence-based planning.

Such low representation constitutes continuing structural discrimination and directly contradicts Serbia's constitutional guarantees and international obligations, including those arising from the Council of Europe's Framework Convention and Chapters 19 and 23 of the EU accession process.

The absence of affirmative measures, politicisation of recruitment, latent antigypsyism and the lack of binding implementation mechanisms have produced a situation in which Roma remain systemically excluded from public service despite high unemployment and the presence of a significant number of highly educated young Roma. One consequence is the silent emigration of qualified professionals, representing a long-term loss for society as a whole.

5. HOUSING

Scale of the Housing Problem

Housing remains one of the most critical areas of Roma inclusion in Serbia. Civil-society estimates indicate that approximately 70% of an estimated Roma population of around 200,000—approximately 140,000 people—live in Roma settlements. Long-term monitoring identifies approximately 250 old and sustainable Roma settlements and 339 substandard settlements across 135 cities and municipalities.

Many of the sustainable settlements have existed for more than 60 years, while some have been inhabited since the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, they remain outside formal urban and spatial-planning frameworks. This prevents residents from securing tenure, registering their property, improving their homes and obtaining reliable access to public services.

Access to Basic Infrastructure

Some positive conditions are evident. Approximately 98% of people living in Roma settlements use basic improved drinking-water sources, 86% use basic sanitation services and 78% have piped water supplied directly to their homes.

However, these figures do not mean that all settlements are connected to adequate public infrastructure. Among substandard Roma settlements, 32% are not connected to the electricity network and 38% are not connected to the public water-supply network. Some households may therefore be classified as having access to basic water while depending on wells, public taps or other arrangements instead of a secure household connection.

The absence of electricity and public water connections has broader consequences for health, safety, education and living standards. It also demonstrates that Roma households continue to experience substantial inequality in access to essential services.

Infrastructure improvements remain fragmented and strongly dependent on municipal priorities and financial capacity. Only nine or 10 of the 135 municipalities and cities concerned—between 6.7% and 7.4%—reportedly allocate budget resources for infrastructure development and the legalisation of sustainable Roma settlements. More than 90% of the relevant local self-government units therefore do not provide dedicated financial support for these purposes. Consequently, improvements remain geographically uneven, and many communities depend on temporary projects and donor support instead of sustainable public investment.

Spatial and Urban Planning

The lack of spatial and urban plans is one of the main obstacles to improving housing conditions. Research conducted in 2024 covered 583 registered Roma settlements, but only 22—or approximately 3.8%—were reportedly covered by some form of spatial regulation plan.

Without appropriate planning documentation, municipalities cannot systematically legalise homes, provide infrastructure or integrate Roma settlements into wider urban development. The limited number of plans is particularly concerning because settlement planning has been discussed for almost 25 years and external funding has previously been provided for preparing planning documentation.

The available information does not identify how many new spatial plans were adopted during the reporting period. It also does not confirm whether all 22 reported plans remain valid or are being implemented. Therefore, no measurable progress in spatial planning can be established.

Property Registration and Legalisation

The legalisation of Roma settlements remained unresolved in 2026. A significant proportion of homes are located on publicly owned land. In other cases, residents who purchased or constructed their homes are not registered as owners in the Real Estate Cadastre, or previous property transfers were never formally recorded.

The legalisation framework introduced in 2015 and amended in 2018 reduced some fees and expanded the possibilities for proving rights over land and buildings. However, monitoring between 2015 and 2025 indicates that lower fees alone did not resolve the problem. Missing ownership documents, unclear land status, the absence of planning documentation and limited institutional support continue to prevent Roma households from completing legalisation procedures.

The 2025 Law on Special Conditions for Recording and Registering Rights in Real Estate introduced a new registration framework. However, the available information does not show how many Roma households applied, how many property rights were registered or how many applications were rejected. General registration procedures also do not appear to address fully the circumstances of longstanding Roma settlements, particularly where homes are situated on public land or where the settlement itself is excluded from planning documents. The law's actual contribution to improving tenure security for Roma therefore cannot yet be assessed.

Tenure Security and Risk of Eviction

The continued absence of legal status leaves residents exposed to eviction, displacement and loss of housing. It also discourages households from investing in improvements and restricts the ability of public institutions to extend infrastructure and services.

Legalisation and infrastructure upgrading should be prioritised in old and sustainable settlements wherever technically possible. Relocation should be considered only where regularisation is not feasible. In such cases, residents should be consulted and provided with sufficient notice, accessible remedies and adequate alternative housing.

Proposed Special Legal Framework

In 2014, Liga Roma submitted a preliminary proposal for a Law on the Legalisation of Sustainable Informal Roma Settlements. The proposal would enable eligible Roma settlements to be recognised and regulated as integrated spatial units through the preparation of detailed urban plans.

Legalisation of a settlement would not automatically legalise every individual building. Instead, it would create the planning and legal conditions under which individual homes could subsequently be registered. The proposal also envisaged mechanisms for allocating or leasing land where unresolved land ownership prevents legalisation.

A specific legal framework could address obstacles that general property-registration legislation has not resolved. It should establish clear criteria for identifying sustainable settlements, simplify procedures, clarify national and municipal responsibilities and provide the necessary financial and technical support.

Assessment of Progress and Regression

The evidence points primarily to long-term stagnation rather than measurable progress. Access to improved water sources and basic sanitation represents a positive element of the current situation, but there are no comparable annual figures showing that these indicators improved during 2025 or 2026.

The principal structural indicators remain concerning:

- 32% of substandard settlements are not connected to electricity;
- 38% are not connected to the public water supply;
- only approximately 3.8% of settlements covered by the 2024 research have spatial plans; and
- only around 7% of relevant municipalities provide budget support for infrastructure and legalisation.

No comprehensive data are available on the number of homes legalised, property rights registered, spatial plans adopted, infrastructure connections completed, evictions conducted or households supported during the reporting period. This absence of data prevents a definitive assessment of numerical regression. Nevertheless, the continued failure to address legalisation, spatial planning and infrastructure deficiencies demonstrates that existing measures have not matched the scale of the housing problem.

PROPOSAL – JUSTIFICATION FOR ADOPTING THE PRELIMINARY DRAFT LAW ON THE LEGALISATION OF SUSTAINABLE ROMA SETTLEMENTS

The Roma community has lived in Serbia for centuries and continues to be one of the country's most vulnerable national minorities, despite the protection guaranteed by numerous international and national instruments, including the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2030.

The exact number of Roma in Serbia remains difficult to determine because of ethnic mimicry, the absence of reliable birth registers and fear of discrimination. This directly affects their housing conditions and social inclusion. According to the 2022 Population Census, 131,936 Roma were recorded, accounting for approximately 1.98% of the total population. However, there is broad agreement that the actual number is several times higher, with estimates ranging from 400,000 to 600,000 people.

The number recorded in the census is expected to increase because of the continued repatriation of Roma from Western European countries under readmission agreements, as well as the ongoing economic and political crisis.

Most of Serbia's Roma population lives in informal settlements and extreme poverty, under the constant threat of forced eviction and with limited access to basic infrastructure such as water, electricity and sewerage. Many Roma do not have a registered permanent address or personal documents, are unaware of their rights, and face systemic discrimination, stigmatisation and racism in the form of anti-Roma racism.

According to reports from 2025, approximately 65% of Roma live in overcrowded housing units in very poor condition, further affecting their health and social mobility. It is therefore recognised that "accommodation providing secure living conditions is a prerequisite for the recognition and exercise of other rights," as emphasised by international organisations such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Roma settlements in Serbia are frequently integrated into urban environments, but they are characterised by poor living conditions, limited living space per resident and overcrowding. Their poverty results from the

profound social exclusion, prejudice and intolerance that Roma have experienced throughout Europe for centuries.

The following is your text with technical corrections. Your wording, structure, quotations and references—including those to Dr Zlata Vuksanović-Macura, Mr Bašić and Mr Miloš Macura—as well as the percentage distribution of settlement types, have remained completely unchanged, without the addition or reformulation of any components. Only spelling errors and joined characters were corrected, and the page number was removed.

Contrary to stereotypes, most Roma do not want to live in ethnically homogeneous environments, but they are forced to do so because of their low social status, reactions from the surrounding population, unemployment and insufficient income.

As Mr Bašić observed, structural poverty is visible in these settlements and is deeply connected to political, legal, social, economic, ethnic and religious factors. Mr Miloš Macura describes their inhabitants as "poorer than the poorest," while many experts regard them as a distinct ethnic class on the margins of society.

Nevertheless, not all Roma settlements are in an irreparable condition. Contemporary criteria for assessing their sustainability should be introduced, including the ownership status of the land, the age of the settlement, proximity to infrastructure and public transport, environmental conditions, and access to education, healthcare and employment.

On the basis of these criteria, four types of Roma settlements can be distinguished in Serbia:

- **Shack settlements:** Unsustainable and illegal structures constructed on land belonging to others.
- **Impoverished settlements:** Settlements situated on land owned by residents but consisting of substandard buildings.
- **Conditionally functional settlements:** Settlements that could satisfy the relevant standards but lack clearly regulated ownership.
- **Functional settlements:** Settlements that comply with the relevant standards and are located on land owned by their residents.

According to data provided by Dr Zlata Vuksanović-Macura, shack settlements account for approximately 20% of all settlements. They were constructed on the outskirts of urban areas, lack infrastructure and cannot be upgraded. They therefore require relocation accompanied by adequate alternative accommodation.

Unserviced settlements account for 69%. These are old settlements with solid structures but varying ownership arrangements. According to the relevant strategic documents, most should be legalised.

Serviced settlements account for 11%. They are already functional but require improvements in the provision of social services.

The Guidelines for the Improvement and Legalisation of Informal Roma Settlements emphasise that "improvement and legalisation constitute a better strategy than any other approach—the least expensive, the least socially painful and the most appropriate for residents." Shack settlements, however, cannot be legalised and require humane alternatives.

Necessity of applying affirmative action to legalisation

The question of why a special law is needed for the legalisation of Roma settlements remains relevant, particularly following the adoption of the 2025 Law on Special Conditions for Recording and Registering Rights in Real Estate, which enables the general legalisation of illegally constructed buildings.

Some international organisations maintain that Roma settlements should not be treated separately. However, Roma poverty has unique characteristics: Roma are trapped in a cycle of "unemployment caused by poverty and poverty caused by unemployment," intensified by social exclusion and discrimination.

According to 2025 data, segregation in housing and education remains a major challenge, with approximately 90% of Roma children participating in separate programmes or living and studying in segregated enclaves.

Affirmative measures are necessary to ensure equitable access to rights because formal equality does not necessarily result in substantive fairness for vulnerable groups. Such measures represent an exception to the prohibition of discrimination and are intended to overcome decades of racism and exclusion in order to achieve substantive equality.

International courts, including the European Court of Human Rights, apply a proportionality test: a measure must be suitable, necessary and proportionate to the legitimate objective pursued.

The Constitution of Serbia supports affirmative measures, but they have not been sufficiently implemented in practice. The Government has recognised the specific problems affecting Roma settlements, including the legal status of property, the quality of buildings and inadequate infrastructure. The adoption of a special law would constitute an important step towards resolving these inherited problems in accordance with EU standards on Roma inclusion.

6. HEALTH

According to the 2022 Population Census, Roma account for approximately 1.96% of Serbia's population. Roma constitute a young population, with more than 50% under the age of 25. Nevertheless, they remain among the groups most severely affected by poverty, exclusion and adverse health outcomes.

Average life expectancy among Roma is approximately 12 years shorter than the national average. Infant mortality in Roma settlements is approximately twice as high, estimated at 13 deaths per 1,000 live births. Mortality among children under five is also considerably higher.

Key indicators

- **Immunisation:** Full vaccination coverage among Roma children aged 24–35 months is between 63% and 66%, compared with 80–81% among the general population. Only 35% of Roma children receive all required vaccines on time. Efforts were made in 2024 and 2025 to increase immunisation coverage as much as possible.
- **Reproductive health:** The fertility rate among Roma women is between 3.1 and 3.5 children per woman, compared with a national average of 1.6. The birth rate among adolescent girls aged 15–19 is between 157 and 163 per 1,000, compared with a national rate of between 12 and 22 per 1,000. Regarding early marriage, 16.9% of Roma girls marry before the age of 15 and 57% before the age of 18. Between 28% and 30.6% of Roma women report having experienced an abortion, compared with between 11% and 14.6% nationally.
- **General health:** Chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases are more prevalent among Roma. Roma use preventive healthcare services less frequently—60%, compared with 73% among the general population. They assess their health less favourably and report unmet healthcare needs more frequently.
- **Access to the healthcare system:** Although 93% are reported as having health insurance, 18% reportedly remain without a health insurance card. Cases of discrimination in healthcare continue to be reported, including unequal treatment and referrals to private healthcare providers.

Positive progress has been achieved through the programme of Roma health mediators, operating in 70 municipalities. The mediators have considerably improved vaccination coverage, registration with a selected primary-care physician, pregnancy monitoring and access to personal documents.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified existing vulnerabilities. Residents of informal settlements without water and electricity, people who lost their income, legally invisible persons, Roma women and children were among those most severely affected.

7. DISCRIMINATION AND ANTIGYPSYISM

A public consultation on amendments to the current Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination is underway in 2026. The overall assessment of the proposed amendments is positive, although there are several important reservations.

The Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination was subject to public consultation in April 2026, with the aim of achieving further alignment with EU directives and strengthening protection mechanisms.

Positive aspects

- **Strengthening the role of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality:** The most important new development is the possibility for the Commissioner to initiate proceedings *ex officio*, rather than acting exclusively in response to complaints submitted by citizens. This represents significant progress because it enables a more proactive approach in cases of systemic discrimination or discrimination that is difficult to prove, including discrimination against Roma, LGBTQ+ persons and persons with disabilities, as well as discriminatory practices within institutions. Until now, the institution has been excessively passive and dependent on victims having the courage to report discrimination.
- **Alignment with EU standards:** The implementation of the relevant EU directives is necessary for Serbia's progress under Chapter 23, concerning the judiciary and fundamental rights. This includes improved definitions, broader protection and more effective sanctions, representing progress towards compliance with European standards.
- **Potential for improved protection of vulnerable groups:** If properly implemented, the amendments could contribute to combating structural discrimination, including the anti-Roma racism discussed previously, hate speech, segregation and discriminatory institutional practices.

Critical observations and limitations

- **Implementation, rather than only the wording of the law, remains the central problem:** Serbia has had a relatively solid anti-discrimination framework since 2009, amended in 2021, but its effectiveness remains limited. There are few convictions, weak cooperation among institutions, no adequate records of hate motivation, and limited public awareness of individual rights. The new provisions will have little significance if the courts, police and public prosecution services continue to apply them slowly and reluctantly.
- **Political independence of the Commissioner:** The current Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Mr Milan Antonijević, was appointed at the end of 2025 amid controversy, including his nomination by the Serbian Progressive Party and a boycott by part of civil society. For the institution to function effectively, the Commissioner must be regarded as credible and independent by all citizens rather than only by one section of the public. This represents a systemic risk that the legislative amendments cannot resolve on their own.

- **Insufficiently ambitious amendments in certain areas:** There are still no sufficiently strong mechanisms for the statistical monitoring of discrimination, mandatory training for judges and police officers, or stricter penalties for repeated violations by public authorities. The amendments could also have addressed affirmative measures and the fight against "benevolent" racism—unsuccessful inclusion policies that do not produce meaningful results—more explicitly.

These amendments represent a step in the right direction, particularly the Commissioner's proposed *ex officio* powers and further alignment with EU standards. It is preferable to have stronger rather than weaker legislation. Nevertheless, the amendments are not revolutionary and will not, by themselves, dramatically change the situation on the ground.

The true value of the amendments will become apparent in practice over the next two or three years. It will be necessary to assess whether the number of prosecuted cases increases, whether more convictions are secured, and whether social distance towards the most vulnerable groups decreases.

If the amendments are implemented alongside complementary measures—including education, improved statistical data and genuine political commitment—they will be useful. If they remain only on paper, as is frequently the case in practical policymaking, Serbia will have yet another well-drafted law that does little to change reality.

3.6. Antigypsyism

- Ethnic distance towards Roma increased from 33% at the beginning of the 2000s to approximately 45% in 2023.
- Training programmes addressing antigypsyism were organised in only 10 local self-government units, representing 7.4% of the total.

Regarding this topic, we present the conclusions for the shadow report adopted at a major gathering of civil society organisations and experts held in December 2025 under the title *Antigypsyism in the Criminal Legislation of the Republic of Serbia*.

The conference *Antigypsyism in the Criminal Code*, held on 9 December 2025, brought together experts, activists, representatives of state institutions and civil society organisations. Its objective was to analyse the legal framework for combating anti-Roma racism, identify the principal problems in the implementation of legislation, and propose measures for the more effective protection of the Roma community.

On the basis of the presentations, discussions and available data, the participants adopted the following conclusions.

1. Antigypsyism as a structural and widespread form of racism

Antigypsyism is a specific form of racism directed against Roma. It encompasses stereotypes, hate speech, institutional discrimination, violence and social exclusion.

According to research conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), antigypsyism is the most widespread form of racism in Europe.

In Serbia, Roma are the national minority most severely affected by discrimination. High levels of violence and hate speech remain unreported and unprosecuted, requiring an urgent and systemic response.

Need for more explicit legal recognition of antigypsyism

Introducing antigypsyism—or anti-Roma racism—as an explicitly recognised and aggravated form of hate crime would have an important preventive and symbolic effect. It would facilitate data collection and encourage victims to report cases.

This approach exists in several EU countries, including Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary and Romania, and is consistent with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The conference participants also identified possible risks, including selective enforcement, conflicts with freedom of expression and overlap with existing legal provisions.

It was therefore proposed that priority should first be given to the consistent application of the existing provisions of the Criminal Code, accompanied by mandatory recording of hate motivation. A one-year deadline should be established for achieving the first visible results, including convictions.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The central conclusion of this shadow report is that Serbia's principal challenge is not the absence of strategies, laws or formal commitments concerning Roma inclusion, but their weak, fragmented and insufficiently financed implementation. The Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women 2022–2030, the Poznań Declaration and the commitments undertaken within the EU accession process provide an adequate policy framework. However, the available evidence demonstrates a persistent gap between these commitments and measurable improvements in the lives of Roma. Unless this gap is addressed through functional institutions, dedicated public financing, reliable data and enforceable accountability mechanisms, Serbia is unlikely to achieve its objectives by 2030.

Institutional coordination remains weak. The national Coordination Body did not operate between 2022 and 2025 and, despite being re-established in September 2025, has not demonstrated regular or effective functioning. Cooperation among line ministries is inconsistent, reporting is incomplete and Roma civil society participation is insufficiently independent and continuous. The lack of sustainable financing further restricts implementation. Roma inclusion expenditure cannot be traced through a unified budget line or budget-tagging system, while approximately 63% of responding local self-government units reported having no dedicated resources for Roma inclusion. Local action plans exist in only one-third of responding municipalities, and only eight municipalities provide operational funding for mobile teams. This continued dependence on donor-funded projects demonstrates that Roma inclusion has not yet been fully integrated into Serbia's regular public-finance system.

Education is one of the areas in which targeted measures have produced visible, although incomplete, progress. Affirmative enrolment, scholarships, free textbooks and pedagogical assistants have supported participation and improved access to preschool and primary education. Nevertheless, transition to secondary and higher education remains limited, only 10 pedagogical assistants work in secondary schools, and Romani Language with Elements of National Culture is taught in only 19 municipalities. Segregation continues to be a structural concern, while incomplete data prevent effective monitoring at school and class level. Employment outcomes are even more concerning. The Roma employment rate is estimated at between 18% and 22%, compared with approximately 50% for the general population. Around 87% of Roma registered with the National Employment Service have no professional qualifications, while only 319 Roma are reportedly employed in the public sector. Discrimination, limited qualifications, informal work and geographical isolation continue to restrict access to sustainable employment.

Housing represents one of the clearest examples of long-term stagnation. Serbia has approximately 339 substandard Roma settlements, yet only around 3.8% of settlements covered by the available research have some form of spatial plan. Among substandard settlements, 32% are not connected to electricity and 38% are not connected to the public water supply. Only around 7% of the relevant municipalities allocate resources for infrastructure or legalisation. The 2025 property-registration legislation may create new opportunities, but its effects on Roma households cannot be assessed because disaggregated implementation data are unavailable. General procedures also fail to address fully buildings located on public land, unclear ownership, irregular parcels and settlements excluded from urban plans. A dedicated legal framework for sustainable Roma settlements therefore remains necessary.

Health inequalities continue to reflect the combined effects of poverty, inadequate housing and unequal access to services. Roma life expectancy remains approximately 12 years below the national average, while immunisation, preventive healthcare and maternal-health indicators remain less favourable. Roma health mediators have produced positive results in vaccination, registration with primary-care physicians and pregnancy monitoring. However, their employment status is not permanently regulated, and their territorial coverage remains insufficient. Their integration into the regular healthcare system, expansion to all municipalities with significant Roma populations and systematic collection of disaggregated health data are essential for sustainable progress.

Antigypsyism remains the underlying factor connecting inequalities across all areas. Ethnic distance towards Roma has reportedly increased to approximately 45%, while institutional training on antigypsyism has been organised in only 10 local self-government units. Hate-motivated incidents remain underreported, records are fragmented and effective investigations and convictions are limited. Proposed amendments to anti-discrimination legislation may strengthen the legal framework, but their effect will depend on implementation, institutional independence and the willingness of the police, prosecution services and courts to identify and address anti-Roma racism.

Overall, the report finds limited and uneven progress combined with persistent structural exclusion. Serbia must move from project-based interventions and formal commitments towards a rights-based system of implementation. Immediate priorities include restoring functional coordination, introducing transparent budget tracking, securing permanent state financing, improving data collection and strengthening meaningful Roma participation. Education, health, employment and housing measures must be implemented in an integrated manner, while antigypsyism must be addressed as a cross-cutting cause of inequality. Progress should be measured through publicly available indicators, executed budgets and demonstrable outcomes. Further delay would jeopardise the objectives of the national Strategy and the Poznań Declaration and undermine Serbia's obligations concerning equality, fundamental rights and European integration.

Recommendations

- Establish an independent Institute for Antigypsyism responsible for researching and monitoring anti-Roma racism, documenting cases, evaluating public policies, developing training programmes and publishing an annual report on antigypsyism in Serbia. Roma civil society organisations and independent experts should participate in its governing and advisory bodies.

- Introduce mandatory and regularly repeated training for police officers, prosecutors, judges, teachers, social workers and public officials on recognising antigypsyism, identifying and proving hate motivation and preventing institutional discrimination.

- Establish a unified hate-crime database connecting data from the police, public prosecutors' offices and courts. The database should record the type of offence, identified hate motivation, institutional response and case outcome, as well as the victim's voluntarily declared ethnicity, subject to strict data-protection safeguards.

- Adopt a binding protocol for the police and public prosecutors on identifying, recording and investigating hate motivation. Failure to investigate an evident discriminatory or hate-related motive should be subject to institutional review and accountability.

- Amend the Criminal Code to explicitly recognise collective punishment, organised attacks and pogroms directed against ethnic communities. At the same time, prioritise the consistent application of existing hate-crime provisions through prosecutorial guidance, judicial monitoring and annual reporting.

- Guarantee free legal aid, psychological support and case-management assistance to victims of antigypsyism. Introduce multiannual public funding for Roma civil society organisations providing victim support, documenting cases and conducting strategic litigation.

- Introduce mandatory anti-discrimination standards for media outlets receiving public funding and establish effective procedures for addressing anti-Roma hate speech in political discourse, traditional media and online platforms.
- Permanently regulate the status of Roma health mediators by establishing them as salaried positions within primary healthcare centres, financed through the Ministry of Health's regular budget. Mediators should receive social insurance, standardised job descriptions, continuous training and opportunities for professional advancement.
- Expand the health-mediator network to every municipality in which Roma account for more than 1% of the population or in which a significant substandard Roma settlement has been identified.
- Establish the objective of reaching the national average for Roma childhood immunisation coverage by 2030. Primary healthcare centres should organise regular mobile vaccination teams in Roma settlements in cooperation with health mediators.
- Introduce voluntary recording of ethnicity in health information systems, accompanied by informed consent and strict safeguards against misuse. The Ministry of Health should publish disaggregated data on immunisation, preventive examinations, maternal health and access to healthcare.
- Conduct a comprehensive national survey on Roma health every two to three years and use its findings to establish measurable objectives in health action plans.
- Provide free reproductive-health counselling and modern contraception to Roma women and girls through primary healthcare centres and community outreach. Strengthen pregnancy monitoring, postnatal care and community nursing services in Roma settlements.
- Adopt a national protocol for preventing and eliminating the segregation of Roma pupils. The Ministry of Education should collect annual data at school and class level, identify segregated schools and require each affected municipality and school to adopt a time-bound desegregation plan.
- Prohibit the creation of new segregated classes and introduce corrective measures for schools and municipalities that fail to implement desegregation plans. Measures should include revised school catchment areas, organised transport and balanced enrolment policies.
- Ensure the enrolment and regular attendance of every Roma child in compulsory preschool and primary education through community outreach, simplified enrolment procedures and the provision of free transport, textbooks, meals and digital equipment.
- Permanently regulate and finance pedagogical assistants within the education system. Their network should be expanded according to the number and needs of Roma pupils, particularly in preschool and secondary education, and maximum caseload standards should be introduced.
- Establish an early-warning system for school dropout based on attendance, academic performance and socioeconomic risk factors. Every child at risk should receive an individual support plan developed by the school, social services, the family and the pedagogical assistant.
- Expand Romani-language teaching beyond the municipalities in which it is currently available by training and employing additional Romani-language teachers and producing standardised teaching materials.
- Introduce mandatory content on Roma history, culture, the Holocaust of Roma and antigypsyism into school curricula and teacher-training programmes.

- Establish a permanent, adequately financed programme for Roma employment within the National Employment Service, supported by a separate budget allocation, annual participation targets and indicators measuring entry into formal employment and job retention.
- Introduce Roma employment mediators in municipalities with significant Roma populations. Mediators should support NES registration, identify individual training needs and connect Roma jobseekers with employers, training providers and available employment measures.
- Introduce mandatory proportional employment quotas of at least 2% for Roma in public administration bodies and state institutions, accompanied by clear deadlines, targeted recruitment procedures and annual reporting.
- Adopt a dedicated Law on the Equal Employment of National Minority Members in the Public Sector, establishing monitoring responsibilities, corrective measures and sanctions for institutions that fail to meet representation requirements.
- Collect and publish annual data on the representation of Roma in public employment, based exclusively on voluntary ethnic self-identification and accompanied by strict data-protection safeguards.
- Introduce mandatory anti-discrimination training for NES counsellors, labour inspectors and public-sector human resources personnel. Employers receiving employment subsidies should be required to comply with equality standards and should lose access to public funding where discrimination is confirmed.
- Introduce separate and clearly identifiable budget lines for implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma at national, provincial and local levels. Allocations should be presented separately for education, health, housing, employment, anti-discrimination and other policy areas.
- Ensure that every action plan contains a detailed cost estimate, identified funding source, responsible institution, implementation deadline, output indicator and target number of beneficiaries. Measures without secured financing should not be included as operational commitments.
- Introduce a Roma-inclusion budget-tagging system within the Ministry of Finance to enable the tracking of allocations and expenditure across all ministries, institutions and levels of government.
- Adopt a dedicated Law on the Legalisation of Sustainable Roma Settlements and harmonise it with the 2025 Law on Special Conditions for Recording and Registering Rights in Real Estate.
- The new law should regulate the legal status of buildings situated on public land, irregular parcels and areas without adequate streets or urban plans, while enabling individual registration, infrastructure development and secure tenure.
- Complete a national mapping and classification of Roma settlements and establish a unified database containing information on legal status, land ownership, housing quality and access to water, sewerage, electricity, roads and waste collection.
- Require the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure and responsible local authorities to prepare detailed urban plans for all sustainable Roma settlements within three years, with the meaningful participation of residents.
- Establish a dedicated multiannual housing and infrastructure fund prioritising settlements without access to drinking water, sanitation and electricity. Annual reports should identify the settlements supported, funds spent, households reached and infrastructure completed.

- Provide free legal and technical assistance to Roma households throughout property registration and legalisation procedures, including assistance with documentation, cadastral procedures and unresolved ownership issues.