Beyond the Barriers:

Roma Resilience in the Western Balkans



Romalitico
ROMA POLICY ANALYSIS

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Beyond Barriers: Roma Resilience in the Western Balkans
Regional Newsletter | January–June 2026

This newsletter presents activities and progress during the first six months of 2026 under the European Union-funded project “Beyond Barriers: Roma Resilience in the Western Balkans.”

The project brings together civil society organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia to strengthen regional cooperation, advance Roma economic empowerment and address antigypsyism. It is coordinated by Romalitico in partnership with InSoC, YUROM Centar, IRCA, Roma Versitas Kosovo and Kali Sara - Roma Information Center.

This edition highlights joint advocacy, institutional engagement, employment and skills initiatives, and efforts to combat discrimination, showing how partners contribute to shared regional objectives through action in their respective countries.

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Progress built across borders

The project aims to improve economic status, social inclusion and the fight against antigypsyism in the Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo) through three key components:

1. **Regional HUB** : The project will establish a coordinated Regional Network of Roma Organizations, which will work to advance Roma inclusion policies. Policies and reforms for Roma will be promoted and monitored in at least five countries, with a focus on the needs of the Roma community and active civil society networks. The regional network will focus on monitoring the sectoral reforms of the European Union for Roma, will map the needs of the Roma community and advocate for their inclusion in policies, as well as creating a donor platform for coordinating support for Roma inclusion in the Balkans.
2. **Economic Progress** : The project will offer specific economic initiatives for Roma, including employment training, development of social enterprises and startups, as well as establishing joint efforts to increase the economic inclusion of the Roma community in the Western Balkans. This component will focus on vocational training and employment of Roma, including conducting needs assessments, developing specialized vocational programs, engaging qualified trainers and personalized mentoring to improve employment opportunities. Within the framework of this component, research and analysis of the labor market will be conducted in order to identify industries with growth potential in the Western Balkans, i.e. sectors of the economy that have a perspective for expansion and development, with increased demand, innovation and creation of new jobs, in order to follow current trends and open new employment opportunities. Establishing partnerships with the business sector in order to identify their needs and respond to them by establishing a database of potential workers. Supporting unemployed Roma in applying for jobs and connecting them with potential employers. Cooperation with national employment institutions towards achieving an inclusive labor market with equal opportunities for Roma.
3. **Antigypsyism** : The project will work to raise awareness of antigypsyism through public policy advocacy and the creation of platforms for regional and national dialogue. Activities include a review of existing legislation in order to identify gaps and areas regarding antigypsyism and address it through the proposal of strategic and legislative reforms, ensuring legal provisions that prevent and protect the rights of Roma.

The project has three main results:

- Formation of a coordinated and unified Regional Network of Roma Organizations
- Targeted economic initiatives to strengthen the economic position of the Roma community in the Western Balkans with real improvements in economic conditions for Roma in the region
- Forming a cooperative regional network to increase awareness and action against anti-Gypsyism at regional and national levels through effective advocacy.

Results for this reporting period:

47	43	45	22
MEETINGS AND ENGAGEMENTS	ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES	VET AND EMPLOYMENT ENTRIES	ANTIGYPSYISM ENTRIES

MEETINGS

From Dialogue to Action: 47 Engagements Across Five Countries

Across six reported months, Beyond Barriers partners used meetings, consultations and coordination processes to bring Roma priorities directly to public institutions, international organizations, donors, employers and civil society networks. These engagements supported policy development, employment and VET opportunities, stronger institutional cooperation, protection from discrimination and participation in decision-making.

47	5	>30	10
ENGAGEMENTS	COUNTRIES	NAMED STAKEHOLDER BODIES	ROMA NGO REPRESENTATIVES QUANTIFIED

Regional Progress

National HUB meetings in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina strengthened coordination among Roma civil society organizations and connected community priorities with the wider Regional Policy Network. These discussions addressed common regional concerns, including employment, VET, women's empowerment, access to justice, Roma participation in decision-making and cooperation with institutions and donors.



Launch event - BiH

Albania: Linking National Policy with Local Support

IRCA worked with national institutions, municipalities, schools, international organizations and civil society networks to strengthen Roma participation in policy development and improve access to services.

At the national and European levels, IRCA engaged with the Central Election Commission, UN agencies, the EU Delegation and the OSCE. These meetings addressed voter education, Roma political representation, EU reforms, access to social services and protection from discrimination. Concrete proposals included culturally sensitive election materials, information in the Romani language and quotas or other mechanisms to improve minority representation.

Local cooperation focused on translating policy into practical support. Meetings with the Free Legal Aid Centre, Tirana Municipal Unit No. 14, the Social Services Directorate of Shkodër, community centres and "Bajram Curri" School strengthened referral mechanisms and coordinated responses for Roma families, NEET youth and students at risk of dropping out.

IRCA also participated in the Local Partners Network in Shkodër, where it reported identifying 65 NEET individuals, and contributed to a national conference on inclusive electoral participation.

IRCA also participated in the National Platform presenting Albania's Action Plan 2026–2030 for Roma and Egyptians. The platform reinforced cooperation between government institutions, civil society, the Council of Europe and the EU Delegation and promoted meaningful Roma participation in implementing the Action Plan.



Antigypsyism activities in Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bringing Overlooked Roma Experiences into Institutional Dialogue

Kali Sara recorded 10 engagements focusing on the rights of Roma civilian war victims, Roma women, elderly Roma, employment, education and vocational training.

Meetings with the European Commission, UN Women, Olam Aid Foundation and Roma community representatives brought greater attention to Roma experiences during the 1992–1995 war. Particular attention was given to Roma women survivors of wartime sexual violence, many of whom remain unrecognized and excluded from available support programmes.

The engagement with UN Women produced a concrete opportunity: Kali Sara was invited to apply for a small grant supporting women survivors and agreed to continue discussions on legal-support mechanisms for Roma civilian war victims. Cooperation with Olam Aid opened possibilities for identifying and assisting elderly Roma, people with disabilities and those requiring home-based support.

Employment was another important focus. The Sarajevo Public Utility Company expressed willingness to cooperate on challenges affecting Roma workers who had not completed primary education. HUB members also agreed to promote a public call for VET programmes and support Roma applicants during the application process.

Kosovo: Strengthening Roma Participation in Strategy and Decision-Making

Six engagements in Kosovo connected Roma civil society with public institutions, international partners and regional networks.

Roma Versitas Kosovo secured an important role in developing the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities 2027–2031 and its Action Plan 2027–2029. RVK agreed to contribute expertise on education, employment and antigypsyism, helping ensure that the new framework responds to community priorities.

Meetings with LuxDev, UN agencies and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian organizations promoted community inclusion in future development programmes. RVK presented the Beyond Barriers project and advocated for Roma inclusion in good governance, digital resilience, entrepreneurship, innovation and research.

HUB coordination continued throughout the period. In June, Roma organizations agreed to develop an Advocacy Operational Plan for 2026–2027, strengthen cooperation and expand dialogue with institutions and donors.

North Macedonia: From Policy Dialogue to Coordinated Institutional Action

Six engagements in North Macedonia addressed EU reporting, fundamental rights, donor cooperation, education, homelessness and informal housing.

Engagement with the EESC Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group provided another opportunity to present the situation of Roma to European stakeholders.

Throughout the project, partners actively contributed to developing national action plans for Roma inclusion and collected institutional data to support research and evidence-based policy analysis.

Serbia: Coordinating Civil Society, Donors and Employment Stakeholders

Four recorded engagements in Serbia focused on property rights, donor coordination and Roma access to emerging employment opportunities.

YUROM brought together 10 representatives of Roma NGOs to discuss the 2025 property-registration law. The meeting helped coordinate community outreach and ensure that Roma homeowners receive accurate information about procedures, eligibility requirements and potential risks.

Donor engagement generated expressions of interest from UNICEF, the European Commission, UNOPS and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

A multi-stakeholder policy dialogue also addressed Roma employment within the green transition. Public institutions and international partners discussed emerging labour-market opportunities and the need for targeted measures to ensure that Roma are not excluded from new green-economy sectors.



Launch event - Serbia

ADVOCACY

Advocacy towards Institutions

During the reporting period, Beyond Barriers partners implemented 43 advocacy activities across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia. The work focused on housing and property rights, education and language rights, equitable representation, employment, Roma women's empowerment, recognition of Roma war victims, EU funding and stronger institutional accountability. Partners combined legal proposals, policy recommendations, research, Shadow Reports, public campaigns, institutional consultations and direct engagement with decision-makers.

43	≥27	≥22	≥9
ACTIVITIES	BODIES ENGAGED OR TARGETED	POLICY PRODUCTS AND INITIATIVES	RESPONSES OR FOLLOW-UPS

Albania: Turning Evidence into Policy Recommendations

IRCA combined independent monitoring with direct engagement in national and European policy processes.

The Shadow Report on public policies for Roma and Egyptian communities examined employment, housing, education, healthcare, social protection, civil registration and antigypsyism. It identified a continuing gap between policy commitments and implementation and called for stronger accountability, coordination, data systems and Roma participation.

IRCA submitted recommendations to the People's Advocate on minority rights and contributed to the EU Delegation's consultation on financial assistance under the 2028–2031 Multiannual Financial Framework. It requested a dedicated funding window for Roma inclusion, multiannual civil-society support and meaningful Roma participation throughout EU-funded interventions.

IRCA also promoted Roma language and culture through an international scientific conference and used the "Volunteering that Changes Lives" event to advocate for inclusive community-based services.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Recognition, EU Funding and Roma Participation

Kali Sara placed the suffering of Roma during the 1990s war on the institutional agenda. Its conference in the Parliamentary Assembly represented the first formal discussion of Roma wartime suffering within this institution, thirty years after the conflict.

Advocacy called for official recognition of Roma civilian victims, judicial cooperation and targeted support for Roma women survivors of sexual violence. These issues were also connected to broader human-rights reforms and Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU-accession process.

Kali Sara and the Roma consortium raised the continued failure to adopt the Roma Action Plan with the European Commission. The delay had blocked the implementation of €12 million in IPA funding intended for Roma inclusion. The Commission acknowledged that the missing Action Plan represented a legal obstacle and expressed readiness to engage with the relevant authorities.

Kali Sara advocated for the independence and legitimacy of the Roma Committee following changes to the selection of Roma representatives.

Advocacy on the IPA 2022 and IPA 2024 frameworks called for clearer objectives, measurable indicators, transparent budgets and direct Roma civil-society participation. A policy brief was initiated to support continued institutional engagement.

Kosovo: Language Rights, Education and Political Participation

Roma Versitas Kosovo established an informal network advocating for official-use status for the Romani language in Obiliq. The initiative was presented to the Council of Europe, the Language Commissioner, the Ministry of Communities and Returns and the Ministry of Justice.

The Language Commissioner agreed to contact the municipality if the mayor did not respond to the formal request. This created a concrete institutional follow-up mechanism for the language-recognition initiative.

RVK also raised concerns about the transition of Roma students from Serbian-language education to the Kosovo education system. It advocated for diploma recognition, continuity of education, language support and institutional safeguards to prevent Roma students from being disadvantaged.

Advocacy concerning the Plemetina Learning Centre highlighted a serious funding gap that could threaten educational support for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children. No funding commitment was reported during the period.

Two evidence products strengthened Kosovo's advocacy: an analysis of Roma political representation and a rolling policy monitor covering anti-discrimination, education, employment and social inclusion.

North Macedonia: Equitable Representation and Stronger Policy Oversight

Romalitico submitted comments on the Europeans Parliament draft country report, highlighting weak Roma Strategy implementation, school segregation, unresolved civil-registration cases, antigypsyism and insufficient employment measures for Roma women and young people.

Cooperation was established with the Inter-Parliamentary Group for Roma Inclusion. Through this channel, Romalitico submitted comments on the Draft Law on Equitable Representation, calling for transparent implementation, objective safeguards, effective monitoring and meaningful Roma civil-society oversight.

Romalitico also contributed recommendations to the National Action Plans on antigypsyism, employment, economic inclusion and Roma women. A comprehensive report covering equitable representation between 2016 and 2025 provided evidence of persistent Roma underrepresentation in state institutions.



Balkan Job Market Platform Presentation - Kosovo



BiH Launch event

Serbia: From a Legal Proposal to Institutional Follow-Up

YUROM and LIGA ROMA submitted a second proposal for a special law on the legalization of sustainable Roma settlements. The proposal called for settlements to be legalized as complete urban units, the introduction of affirmative measures and protection against forced eviction without suitable alternative accommodation.

A public campaign and media engagement explained why the existing property-registration law did not adequately address the situation of Roma settlements. Following

engagement with the Ministry of Construction, the original proposal was not fully accepted, but the authorities agreed to establish a joint commission to identify and support Roma residents who had missed the registration deadline.

Further advocacy contributed to an additional property-registration deadline for Roma residents until 10 October 2026.

YUROM also advocated for approximately 110 Roma families in the Crvena Zvezda settlement affected by prolonged electricity disconnections. It called for individual meters, debt restructuring and a sustainable institutional solution. No final resolution was reported.

The League of Roma additionally advocated for Roma candidates to have equal access to planned training for 100 bus drivers in Belgrade.

VET AND EMPLOYMENT

From Skills to Jobs: Expanding Roma Employment Opportunities

During the reporting period, Beyond Barriers partners implemented 45 VET, skills-development and employment activity entries across five Western Balkan countries. The work combined vocational training, digital skills, career guidance, employer outreach, job matching, self-employment support and institutional cooperation. A major regional achievement was the development and promotion of the Balkan Job Market platform. At the national level, partners supported direct employment, facilitated training and increased access to public employment programmes.

45	26	33	566
ACTIVITY ENTRIES	COACHING AND TRAINING PLACES	DIRECT JOB PLACEMENTS	GRANT APPLICATIONS

From Skills to Jobs: Expanding Roma Employment Opportunities

Across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia, the project combined vocational training, employment coaching, employer engagement, job matching, entrepreneurship support and stronger cooperation with public employment institutions. These activities helped Roma jobseekers improve their skills, access labour-market services and connect with concrete employment and self-employment opportunities.

In Albania, 26 coaching and training places were provided, including employment coaching for 15 participants, digital-skills training for eight beneficiaries and vocational training in aesthetics for three young Roma women. Cooperation with employers and employment institutions produced 30 direct placements: six people found jobs through employer mediation, while 24 beneficiaries secured one-year, part-time employment through the Community Public Works Programme. Additional outreach to businesses and public employment services expanded opportunities for Roma and young people not in employment, education or training.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kali Sara launched the process of selecting vocational-training providers and conducted community outreach to potential participants, with particular attention to Roma women. Cooperation with the Employment Service of Canton Sarajevo led to an agreement to begin preparing a Memorandum of Cooperation on access to retraining, upskilling and qualification programmes. Three Roma men also secured temporary employment with the Sarajevo Public Utility Company.

At the regional level, the Balkan Job Market platform created a new connection between Roma jobseekers, employers, institutions and civil society. Led technically from North Macedonia, the platform was developed, localized and tested before being presented at Europe House in Skopje and promoted in Kosovo. Roma Versitas Kosovo engaged EuroMetal, Viva Fresh Store and ETC, while a policy document provided recommendations for supporting Roma employment, entrepreneurship and Roma-owned businesses. Romalitico also engaged the Ministry of Economy on the recognition of VET certificates, although a final institutional agreement was not reported.

In Serbia, large-scale outreach and individual guidance contributed to 566 Roma candidates applying for the National Employment Service's self-employment grant programme. Nine grant recipients considering withdrawal received additional counselling, while 30 potential candidates were identified for vocational training in occupations facing labour shortages. Cooperation with certified training providers, the National Employment Service and the Roma Cultural Centre in Niš strengthened the pipeline for future training, self-employment and job-matching activities.

North Macedonia led the platform's technical development, localization and testing before its presentation at Europe House in Skopje. Romalitico also published the public call for vocational education and training and selected Roma candidates according to established criteria and labour-market needs. In addition, it engaged the Ministry of Economy in discussions on the recognition and validation of VET certificates.

ANTIGYPSYISM

From recognition to institutional action

Across five countries, partners treated antigypsyism as a structural form of racism requiring legal recognition, stronger institutional responses, responsible media practice and direct protection for Roma people affected by discrimination and violence.

22	5	4	3
RECORDED ENTRIES	COUNTRIES	CASE-BASED ACTIONS	DECISIONS OR COMMITMENTS

Albania: Integrating Antigypsyism into Policy and Media Practice

IRCA advocated for antigypsyism to be recognized as a structural and cross-cutting issue in Albania's National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians 2026–2030. Its recommendations included affirmative recruitment measures and mandatory anti-discrimination training in public institutions.

IRCA was also selected for the Alternative Journalism project, which monitors media narratives and promotes fair and inclusive reporting about Roma and other marginalized groups. The initiative combines media analysis, journalist training and cooperation between civil society and media organizations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Building Institutional Awareness and Responding to Discrimination

Kali Sara developed a national report examining the historical, social and institutional dimensions of antigypsyism. The Antigypsyism Working Group reviewed and finalized the document, identifying systemic barriers in education, employment, healthcare and political participation.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Education of Canton Sarajevo, Kali Sara organized training for government officials on stereotypes, prejudice, power, identity and antigypsyism as a specific form of racism. This represented a concrete step from research and planning to institutional capacity-building.

At the NO Hate Speech Conference in Strasbourg, Kali Sara presented Beyond Barriers tools and experiences and recommended integrating support for Roma women survivors of sexual violence into relevant Council of Europe programmes.

Kali Sara also submitted a complaint concerning alleged police violence against a Roma family in Tuzla Canton. It requested an investigation into possible excessive force and ethnic discrimination. No institutional decision was reported during the period.

Kosovo: Strengthening Justice and Media Accountability

The Office of Good Governance agreed to organize specialized training for prosecutors, judges and the Police Academy. The sessions were designed to improve institutional understanding of hate speech, discrimination and antigypsyism and strengthen the handling of rights-violation cases.

RVK also contributed to a formal complaint submitted to the Independent Media Commission concerning stereotypical and discriminatory content in the television series "Logikonomia." The complaint requested enforcement of media standards and more dignified representation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

On 4–5 May, when Roma Versitas Kosovo organised capacity-building training for Kosovo Police officers, including newly recruited cadets and representatives of minority communities. Practical exercises focused on identifying, preventing and responding to hate speech, discrimination and antigypsyism.

North Macedonia: Institutional Recognition and Legislative Reform

Romalitico, the OSCE Mission, Ombudsperson, Roma Resource Centre and other stakeholders discussed manifestations of antigypsyism and the need to strengthen anti-discrimination legislation. Participants proposed reopening discussions on amendments to the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination.

A separate case produced an important institutional result. Following Romalitico's complaint against a local public official, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination established repeated and prolonged harassment against Roma. The Commission recognized the derogatory terminology used as a symbolic form of antigypsyism and recommended removal of the content, a public apology and prevention of future discriminatory or hateful communication. In May, Romalitico examined

Spanish experiences and the Spanish Protocol on Antigypsyism.



Training on racially motivated crimes for police officers - Skopje

Serbia: Legal recognition and media

Roma civil society submitted written input in response to ECRI Recommendation No. 45, documenting hate speech in the media, online platforms and political discourse. The submission called for formal recognition and criminalization of antigypsyism and stronger enforcement and accountability.

A collection of papers and conference proceedings on antigypsyism were published and promoted. The publications examined hate speech, institutional exclusion and criminal-law responses and provided recommendations for recognizing and sanctioning crimes motivated by antigypsyism.

Advocacy also addressed specific rights violations. Mediation brought together Roma residents of the Crvena Zvezda settlement, local authorities, the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality to seek a solution to prolonged electricity disconnections.

A proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Justice to codify antigypsyism in the Criminal Code, while a related initiative was sent to the Council of Europe.

Following complaints from Roma HUB organizations, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality issued a warning to TV Informer and its editor-in-chief over content containing anti-Roma statements.

Commissioner for the Protection of Equality to seek a solution to prolonged electricity disconnections.initiated discussions with the Minister without Portfolio, NDI and the Inter-Parliamentary Group for Roma Inclusion on adapting a similar institutional mechanism in North Macedonia.

Visibility of the project

Across the supplied January–June 2026 records, project partners documented at least 100 unique media and visibility outputs across five implementation settings. The strongest documented channel was online portals and websites (36 outputs), followed by TV/video media (29), social media (27) and radio (8).

100	36	29	5
UNIQUE OUTPUTS	ONLINE PORTALS AND WEBSIDES	TV/ VIDEO APPEARANCE	COUNTRIES

Executive snapshot

Channel	Outputs	Share	What was counted
Online portals & websites	36	36.0%	News articles, online reports and institutional/organisational webpages
Social media	27	27.0%	Facebook and Instagram posts or reels used primarily for direct outreach
TV & video media	29	29.0%	TV reports, programmes and interviews, including segments hosted on YouTube/Facebook
Radio	8	8.0%	Radio programmes, interviews and broadcast coverage

Main themes communicated

Housing and legal security. From January through March, Serbian media repeatedly addressed the registration and legalisation of homes in Roma settlements, the limits of the “Svoj na svome” law and calls for a permanent, systemic legal solution.

Antigypsyism and anti-Roma racism. March and especially April visibility connected the fight against discrimination with institutional responsibility, International Roma Day and public discussion of the term and consequences of antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism. May RTK Roma coverage also highlighted practical cooperation with the Kosovo Police on identifying and reporting hate speech and discrimination.

Employment and skills. The visibility record included Job Matching Officer recruitment and outreach, VET promotion, the Balkan Job Market launch in Skopje and national TV presentations in May, its promotion in Prishtina, employment and education messages, a free-training call for young Roma, and radio coverage of waste collectors, employment and the circular economy.

Language, history and identity. Broadcasts and public events highlighted Roma history in the Balkans, preservation of the Romani language and the Obiliq initiative for recognition of Romani at municipal level.

Institutional dialogue and public accountability. Partners used social and institutional media to communicate meetings with public authorities, the Roma HUB Working Group, cooperation with development actors and public reactions to violence against Roma youth.