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 - December 2024 – December 2025

This newsletter presents activities and progress during the first year of implementation of 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.

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Beyond Barriers: Roma Resilience in the Western Balkans
Beyond Barriers

Roma Resilience in the Western Balkans

In its first year, Beyond Barriers established a regional civil society network, produced evidence for policy advocacy and supported Roma access to skills and employment. Across five countries, partners also formed national working groups and delivered training and awareness activities to address antigypsyism.

34 Roma and pro-Roma CSOs	**55** stakeholder meetings	**5 + 1** national monitoring reports and regional Shadow Report
62 Roma involved in VET	**37** reported employment placements	**5** national antigypsyism working groups

A regional network in action

The Regional Policy Network Hub brought together 34 organisations. National hubs linked community priorities with regional advocacy through shared analysis, joint positions and coordinated responses to discrimination.

Membership spans Albania (8), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5), Kosovo (4), North Macedonia (8) and Serbia (9).

Evidence for policy dialogue

Five national monitoring reports and a regional Shadow Report examined Roma inclusion policies, sectoral reforms, services and public budgets. The Shadow Report was submitted to the EU Delegation in North Macedonia on 30 April 2025 and presented to stakeholders in May.

Advocacy grounded in community needs

Partners held 55 stakeholder meetings with public institutions, Roma communities, civil society, employers and international actors. Policy outputs addressed employment, housing, waste collectors' livelihoods, digital inclusion and antigypsyism.

Examples include proposals on Roma housing and waste collection in Serbia, a paper on aligning vocational training with labour-market demand in North Macedonia, and briefs on minority self-identification and digital inclusion in Albania.

Strengthening civil society capacity

In Albania, a one-day needs assessment training engaged 25 Roma NGO participants. It supported the identification of community priorities and the preparation of advocacy aligned with national and EU policy frameworks.

Progress built across borders

Beyond Barriers aims to improve economic inclusion, equal opportunities and action against antigypsyism in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo. Three complementary components connect regional cooperation with national advocacy and practical support for Roma communities.



Regional Hub

The Regional Network for Roma Inclusion is a collaborative platform designed to bring civil society organisations, governments and international donors into dialogue on Roma inclusion. Its three pillars are policy advocacy, monitoring and accountability, and capacity building.

The component promotes and monitors inclusion policies and EU sectoral reforms, maps community needs and advocates for their inclusion in public policy. It also envisages a donor platform to coordinate support across the region. Roma voices and participation in decision-making are central to this work.

Economic Advancement

This component equips Roma young people who are not in employment, education or training with practical skills, connects jobseekers with employers and supports community-led entrepreneurship.

The approach combines needs assessments, specialised vocational programmes, qualified trainers, mentoring and job matching. Labour-market research and business partnerships inform training and employment opportunities. Pilot social enterprises, cooperatives and start-ups are intended to strengthen long-term economic resilience.

Antigypsyism

The component promotes institutional recognition of antigypsyism as a human rights issue and supports inclusive policy reform. Legislative reviews identify gaps, while working groups, policy reports and recommendations guide proposals to strengthen prevention and protection.

Training, advocacy and national and regional dialogue bring institutions and civil society together to improve understanding and responses to discrimination.

Skills and access to employment

62

Roma involved in vocational education and training

Albania accounted for 32 participants and Kosovo for 30. By the end of the reporting period, 17 participants had completed training and 45 remained in ongoing programmes.

Training linked to working life

In Albania, activities combined coaching for employment, digital skills and vocational learning. Participants practised job searching, CV preparation, interviews and workplace communication, alongside learning about labour rights and self-employment.

In Kosovo, apprenticeship-based courses focused on mechanics, cosmetics and hairdressing. Practical learning was supported by field monitoring and follow-up to encourage participation and retention.

Needs assessments and preparations for VET delivery also began in North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Cooperation with employers

Eight memoranda of understanding established cooperation with employers' organisations, training providers and employment institutions: two in North Macedonia, four in Kosovo, one in Albania and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

37

Roma reported to have secured employment through project-supported actions

Employment results by country

Albania — 15 beneficiaries secured employment in private-sector and civil society roles. Separately, two beneficiaries entered hospitality internships at Deserto Coffee and More.

North Macedonia — 7 Roma jobseekers secured employment in private companies through job matching and employer cooperation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina — 15 beneficiaries entered public seasonal work. Four subsequently moved into permanent employment in public utility companies.

Preparing the next steps

A service provider was selected to develop the regional job-matching platform. In Albania, an information session introduced 20 Roma community members to the public self-employment programme and application requirements.

Regional cooperation and employment



Regional Hub meeting



Training for prosecutors and judges – North Macedonia



HUB meeting – Bosnia and Hercegovina



VET activities – Albania

From evidence to institutional dialogue

The first year combined monitoring, community consultation and policy proposals. Partners used this evidence in meetings with public institutions and other stakeholders, while the Regional Hub supported a shared approach across countries.

A common evidence base

A common methodology for the regional Shadow Report was finalised in February 2025. Partners reviewed official statistics, government documents, legislation, budgets and institutional monitoring information, complemented by formal requests for information.

The analysis examined gaps between Roma inclusion commitments and implementation, including coordination problems and funding in employment, education and health. Five national monitoring reports fed into the regional Shadow Report, submitted on 30 April 2025 and presented to stakeholders on 16 May 2025.

Employment policy proposals

In North Macedonia, the paper on aligning skills with labour-market demand identified mismatches between training provision and employer needs. It proposed employer-linked training, internships, performance-based funding and stronger measures against discrimination in hiring.

In Kosovo, analysis of employment among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities focused particularly on women and girls. It examined access to vocational education, labour-market services and public and private employment, providing recommendations for more inclusive employment measures.

Housing and livelihoods

In Serbia, advocacy addressed the legal position of individual waste collectors and the unresolved land-ownership barriers facing residents of informal Roma settlements. Proposals combined legal recognition, social protection and formal employment with environmental objectives.

A local budget initiative submitted to the Municipality of Odžaci proposed a municipal social enterprise for waste collection to formalise Roma waste collectors' employment. This remained a proposal, rather than an established enterprise.

Rights and digital inclusion

In Albania, IRCA's brief on minority self-identification examined CMD No. 843/2024 and recommended a voluntary framework with stronger protection of sensitive personal data. A separate brief on digital inclusion drew on two public consultations to identify barriers to using e-government services.

Proposed measures included digital centres, affordable devices and internet, municipal help desks and employment-linked training. These services were not reported as established.

Institutional responses

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees accepted priorities submitted by Kali Sara during consultations on the Roma Action Plan 2026–2030. These concerned education, employment and combating antigypsyism.

Building regional cooperation

A survey involving 19 organisations identified shared advocacy priorities. Monthly and bilateral coordination, followed by the first online Regional Hub meeting in September 2025, supported alignment between national priorities and regional objectives.

Partners also built links with wider civil society networks. Kali Sara participated in the initiative monitoring Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration, Romalitico joined a network countering hate speech in the media, and IRCA initiated a partnership process with Albania's Consumer Protection Network.

Preparation for a donor cooperation platform included donor mapping and engagement with international partners. The formal platform had not yet been established by the end of the reporting period.

National activities and results

Across the five countries, partners combined policy advocacy with practical action on employment, public services and discrimination. These highlights show how the regional priorities were taken forward nationally.

North Macedonia

Justice and policing. Training delivered with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors reached 63 judges and prosecutors. A further two-day training at the Police Training Centre Idrizovo engaged 45 police officers and candidates on hate crimes, bias indicators and fair policing, in partnership with the OSCE Mission, ODIHR and the Council of Europe.

Albania

Public employment cooperation. IRCA signed a contract with the National Employment and Skills Agency for a 12-month Public Works Programme in Tirana, providing part-time employment and skills development opportunities for 24 economically vulnerable people, primarily long-term unemployed Roma.

Inclusive public services. In Elbasan, 25 local officials and frontline service providers received training on antigypsyism and service delivery. An awareness session supported 23 Roma parents to understand discrimination in education and available complaint mechanisms.

Digital access. A policy brief informed by two public consultations identified barriers to e-government services and proposed community digital centres, municipal help desks and tailored training.

Serbia

Waste collectors' livelihoods. YUROM proposed five models for formalising individual waste collectors and advocated with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ombudsman for legal recognition and social protection.

Housing and representation. YUROM proposed a special law on informal Roma settlements and amendments addressing land ownership. With civil society partners, it also proposed enforceable equal-employment measures for ethnic minorities in public administration.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Influencing the next Roma Action Plan. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees accepted priorities and recommendations submitted by Kali Sara during consultations on the 2026–2030 plan, particularly in education, employment and combating antigypsyism.

Institutional cooperation. The Ministry committed to joining the antigypsyism working group. The Agency for Labour and Employment signed a memorandum with civil society organisations on skills, mentoring and employment inclusion.

Kosovo

Evidence on women's employment. A report examined employment among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in 2022–2025, with particular attention to women and girls, access to vocational training and public employment measures.

Protection against discrimination. A policy paper identified enforcement gaps and proposed stronger safeguards, accountability and remedies. Dissemination was planned for the next reporting period.

Country activities and institutional engagement



Antigypsyism conference – Serbia



Meeting of the group on Antigypsyism – North Macedonia



Meeting with Employer's Association – Bosnia and Hercegovina

Building knowledge and accountability

5 working groups

43 members across the five participating countries

Each working group held a constitutive meeting. Their work was supfported by institutional consultations and dialogue on recognising antigypsyism in legislation and public policy.

Training and awareness

The report records 199 participants across training and awareness activities: 63 judges and public prosecutors, 45 police officers and candidates, 25 local officials and frontline staff, 20 Roma NGO representatives and activists, 23 Roma parents and 23 students.

Sessions used practical cases to examine discrimination, bias indicators, fair policing, public service delivery and access to complaint mechanisms.

From documentation to institutional response

In Serbia, four documented cases involving political statements, media content and police communication resulted in opinions from the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality confirming discrimination and recommending corrective measures.

Partners also documented discriminatory education materials and racist political speech in North Macedonia, and an education discrimination case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Cases were brought to competent institutions.

56 participants

at two national stakeholder events in Albania and Kosovo

The events brought together institutions, civil society, academia and Roma community representatives to discuss legal frameworks, lived experiences and policy responses. The Kosovo roundtable involved 36 participants; the Albania conference involved 20.

Making the work visible

Partners shared more than 120 social media and media-related publications. The report records at least 45 national and regional media mentions across television, radio, online outlets and newspapers.