

Moving On:

ACCESS TO SPORT FOR ROMA, SINTI, & TRAVELLERS IN EUROPE



MOVING ON



CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION PROMOTING EQUALITY

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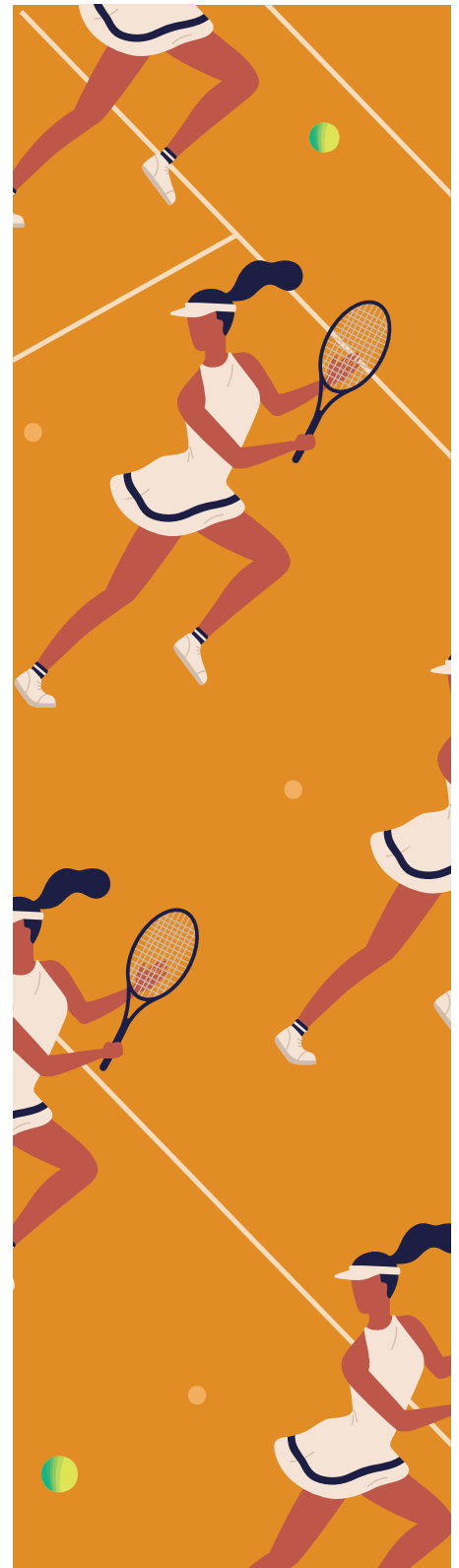


Executive Summary

This report is intended to expose the structural barriers preventing Roma, Sinti, and Travellers in Europe from enjoying equal access to sport and physical activity. Focussing on four EU member states (the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, and Spain), this document is the first of its kind to examine not only access to sport for Romani and Traveller people, but also the role sport can play as a tool of inclusion and anti-discrimination in local, national, and European policy. The report considers the intersection between gender and identity as a cross-cutting issue throughout the research, focussing on the barriers to accessing sport and physical activity for Romani and Traveller women and girls as forms of intersectional discrimination and prejudice.

This report demonstrates that antigypsyism (the specific form of structural racism faced by Romani and Traveller people) is the primary driver of exclusion from sport and physical activity in each of the target countries. While policy at a national level is mostly aware of the gender gap in sport participation and is sometimes sensitive to the participation of Roma and Travellers in sport and physical activity, the participation of Romani and Traveller women and girls is totally absent from policy consideration. The gender awareness that exists in sport policy is largely colour-blind, resulting in a de facto focus on the majority (white) population without consideration of the needs of women and girls from minority backgrounds.

A further policy failure was noted in the lack of targeted measures. While the grouping of minority groups for sport policy is convenient, the unique level of exclusion faced by Roma and



Travellers in all the study countries warrants special consideration by policy makers. For example, people who are racially excluded from society, often without access to clean running water or basic public infrastructure, have completely different needs to citizens who identify as LGBTIQ+ (with both deserving of considered, targeted, and costed approaches).



The report identified that the best solutions to encouraging increased sport participation in the study countries were the ones that were most participatory in terms of ownership of the activities by Romani and Traveller communities.

When Romani and Traveller people were not only the architects of such participation programmes, but also the primary contact point with communities, more durable patterns of sport participation are created beyond the duration of a specific project or strategy. For Romani and Traveller women and girls, targeted community outreach over much longer periods should follow the same participatory model to ensure that the extra barriers they face on account of their gender identity are addressed.

The report identifies participatory, Romani and Traveller stewarded sport activities as having benefits beyond the immediate gains for those individuals. These activities can be seen as embodied examples of true inclusion which may even be used to tackle structural issues brought about by antigypsyism. Such promising inclusive efforts to combat racism should not be relegated to obscurity but promoted as a working policy tool throughout Europe. ■



INTRODUCTION

The role of sport and physical activity as a tool of public health is one that has been explored at European and national levels, but rarely in the context of targeted actions towards ethnic minority groups. The notion of sport specifically as a tool of anti-discrimination and inclusion enjoys modest popularity amongst civil society organisations working with Romani and Traveller communities, but it has rarely been considered as a serious method for combating racism by national or European institutions thus far. This report is intended to explore the existing policy affecting access to sport for Roma, Sinti, and Travellers as well as barriers which prevent their enjoyment of equal access.

This report was prepared by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) in cooperation with four of the ‘Moving On’ project organisations:

European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)

The ERRC is the largest Roma Rights organisation in Europe, working across 16 countries to combat anti-Roma racism and human rights abuses of Romani people through strategic litigation, advocacy, research, policy development, and human rights training of Romani activists and volunteers. Since its founding in 1996, the Roma-led organisation has brought more than 1000 legal actions against racist governments and authorities across the continent.

INEX-Sdružení dobrovolných aktivit (INEX-SDA):

INEX-SDA uses football to empower and educate young people from ethnic minority communities in the Czech Republic at risk of social isolation (mostly from Romani communities) through its educational platform ‘Fotbal pro rozvoj’ (Football for



development). Since 2016, Fotbal pro rozvoj also organises a league of ‘fair-play football’ that supports access to sporting activities for those young people and encourages them to develop positive social behaviour and competences through the adaptive game of football. Together with the FARE Network, they also implemented a project (YARSPE project) that is developing social competences through sport to create programs against the exclusion of young people from the most marginalised groups.

Exchange House Ireland

Exchange House Ireland uses sport and physical activity in the services they provide through the ‘Children and Young People’s Service’ and ‘Traveller Men and Women’ project, part of the National Traveller Mental Health Service. Exchange House Ireland has established two football teams: “Pavee Celtic”, an official FA Ireland recognised club; and an inter-Traveller-site football league for teenage boys in Dublin. They have also provided support for a Gaelic Athletic Association club based in County Wicklow with a large Traveller membership. The organisation partners with local sports initiatives to support Traveller involvement, especially women, in sports and physical activity (team sports, yoga, gym etc.) in County Clare and County Dublin.

Gea Social Cooperative

Gea works at local level to promote intercultural dialogue and combat racism and xenophobia against migrant and refugee people, in particular youth and women, as well as improving and facilitating access to health, education, and basic services. Gea uses sports and culture as its main tools to promote dialogue and active participation of youth and women from minority communities.



Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña (FAGiC)

FAGiC, created in 1991, is the largest and most representative Romani organisation in its region, gathering 96 Romani associations from all over Catalonia.

The organisation defends and promotes the rights and culture of Romani people in Catalonia, improving their lives and reducing the inequalities between Romani and non-Romani people. FAGiC works especially with young people and

women, combating discrimination and antigypsyism through activities in different areas such as social activities, youth work, women's rights, culture, education, sports, political participation, and communication with local, regional, national, and European institutions. FAGiC develops sports programmes, especially football, together with its federated associations to motivate Romani children and youngsters and promote healthy lifestyle habits and wellbeing.



A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term “Romani and Traveller” is used in this report when referring in general to communities existing across multiple countries in Europe.

This report uses the term “Romani” as an all-encompassing adjective for groups which trace their origin to the Indian sub-continent and may or may not speak a language which has its roots in this geographic context. This term, drawn from the example of the Council of Europe’s use of “Roma,”¹ has its shortcomings in not adequately describing the great diversity of Romani peoples.

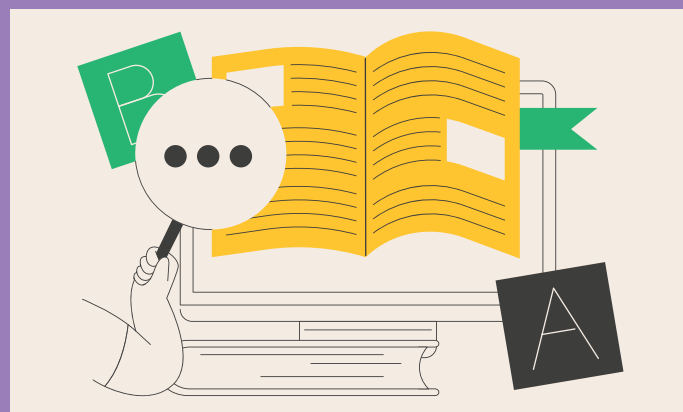
The terms used to describe this diversity within Romani populations in this report cannot adequately do justice to the sheer variety of groups, who often identify with names more specific to their people than “Roma” or “Romani.” Purely for the sake of brevity and accessibility, these terms will also encompass the number of non-Romani groups who are culturally or contextually related, and are also treated

with the same racism and hostility by society (e.g. Caminanti, Yeniche, Domari people).

The term “anti-Roma” is used to describe hate crimes, racism, and discriminatory actions against those who are perceived to be Romani people. This too is mainly for brevity’s sake, and the word “Roma” is used here to refer to groups beyond those who necessarily identify as Roma.

When discussing communities specifically within one of the study countries, the precise terms will be used (e.g., Travellers in Ireland or Caminanti in Italy). ■

¹ “The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.” Council of Europe (2012) “Descriptive Glossary of Terms relating to Roma issues.” 18 May 2012, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/1680088eab>



Methodology

Aims of the report

This report is intended to act as a fact-finding study to inform the wider 'Moving On Project' on the main barriers to participation in sport and physical activity facing Romani and Traveller communities in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. The report is largely based on the activities and expertise of the European Roma Rights Centre and national organisations (INEX-SDA, Exchange House Ireland, GEA, FAGiC) implementing the project in each of the target countries.

As well as to understand the barriers to sport and physical activities, the study is intended to analyse the representation and consideration of sport and physical activities within the EU and national strategies and policies targeting Romani and Traveller communities. The research is also intended to elucidate gender disparities in sport participation and show how intersecting identities can result in multiple discrimination in accessing sports and physical activity.

This report is not meant to act as a representative study, but rather a snapshot of the situation of sports participation for Romani and Traveller communities in each country to facilitate access programmes and other advocacy work at a national and EU level and improve access for these communities. The work should create an initial base of contacts with relevant and key stakeholders that partners can involve in activities as local, national, and European actors later in the project. The study seeks to discover the extent to which sport is, or could be, used as a tool of inclusion to actively combat discrimination and marginalisation of Romani and Traveller people in Europe.



Desk research and interviews

This publication was written based on a combination of desk research and interviews with experts at a national and EU level, as well as with Romani and Traveller people engaged in sport at varying levels. The desk research was carried out by researchers from each of the national organisations, as well as ERRC staff, country human rights monitors, and activists. The ERRC's catalogue of research on structural discrimination and antigypsyism in Europe was used throughout to inform the desk research component.

Interviews with experts at an EU level (including international NGOs and representatives of the European Commission) were carried out by ERRC researchers. National organisations carried out the interviews with representatives of sports clubs, local municipalities, social workers, politicians, and Romani and Traveller athletes at amateur and elite level. In total, 29 people were interviewed as part of this project.¹ The majority of interviewees declined to have their names or personal information used publicly.

¹ Listed in an annex of interviews at the end of the report.

Rather than a series of proscribed questions for interviews, a set of ‘desired outcomes’ was developed to encourage a less formulaic and more conversational interview which was thought to provide better insights. These desired outcomes served as a guideline to the interview component, with different outcomes drawn up for each potential interviewee:

Government institution responsible for sport - statement on the efforts made to encourage Romani/Traveller participation in sport / or statement on the lack of government engagement with Roma/Travellers and sport.

Local authorities’ representative - opinion on the role of sport in overcoming discrimination and how they do/ do not use sports as community outreach.

Sports clubs / associations representative - information on what access schemes they have to encourage Romani and Traveller participants or lack thereof, insights into challenges they face in enabling Romani/Traveller participation.

Romani/ Traveller sports participants - thoughts on how important they feel sport is in their lives, what difficulties they face in accessing sport, how barriers they have faced could be overcome to allow more Roma/Travellers to participate in sports activities. Thoughts on if certain sporting activities are more prone to discrimination than others and why (e.g. swimming compared to boxing).

Romani/Traveller professional athletes - insight into the path that led them to becoming a successful sportsperson, what were the conditions that allowed them to succeed? How they see discrimination as a barrier to sports participation as well as how sport may serve to overcome discriminatory practices and attitudes in society. ■





EU Policy on Roma & Travellers

STEPS TOWARDS A ROMA POLICY FOR EUROPE

The first overture towards an EU response to tackling discrimination against Roma in Europe was in 1984. The European Parliament passed resolution C172/153, acknowledging that “*gypsies [sic] still suffer discrimination in law and practice*” and appealing to the ten EU member states existing at that time to end discrimination against Romani people.¹

The history of concerted EU policy towards Romani & Traveller people begins around the mid-1990s, after the enlargement of the European Union, with a series of parliamentary resolutions from the European Parliament. A growing awareness that the human rights protection of the continent’s largest ethnic minority group could not

The history of concerted EU policy towards Romani & Traveller people begins around the mid-1990s

be left to the vagaries of individual member states’ politics led to the beginning of EU level policy towards Romani inclusion. The first ‘Resolution on Discrimination Against the Roma’ (13 July 1995)² called on European Institutions to work together with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to combat anti-Roma discrimination. Over the next decade or so, two new waves of EU enlargement (2004 and 2007) created an estimated 4.5

million more Romani EU citizens. The accession processes of new member states in Central and Eastern Europe brought the plight of Roma in those countries into sharper focus for the European Union. With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the prospect of the free movement of new Romani EU citizens to Western Europe drew the older member states further into the policy machinations of Roma Inclusion in Eastern Europe and across the

¹ Open Democracy (2012) “28 years after... while Roma wait”, Valeriu Nicolae, 23 May 2012, Available: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/28-years-after-while-roma-wait/>

² European Parliament (1995) “Minutes of the sitting of Thursday, 13 July 1995, B4-0974/95 Resolution on discrimination against the Roma”, Official Journal of the European Communities C 249, Volume 38, 25 September 1995, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1995:249:FULL&from=EN#page=165>



2011 resolution recognised “the vital role that grass roots and performance sports” can have for social inclusion of Roma in Europe

bloc. The European Union, and the European Commission in particular, began a shift from its hands off approach to minority rights towards a more interventionist stance culminating in explicit frameworks and directives towards combating discrimination and socio-economic inequality amongst Romani and Traveller communities.

A ‘Resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union’ (28 April 2005)³ was the first to

call for the recognition of Romani people as a European minority and documented the first use of the term *antigypsyism* by an EU institution. Another parliamentary resolution on the situation of Romani women in the European Union⁴ acted as a stepping stone to a 2008 joint motion for a resolution calling on the European Commission to develop a European Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion.

Outbreaks of extreme hate crimes, hate speech at a political level, and explicit anti-Roma policies in Italy and France between 2008 and 2010 proved that the issue of Romani inclusion could not be confined to the newly joined member states in Eastern Europe, and required a concerted EU-wide response. The newly proposed Roma Framework was aimed at providing policy coherence at an EU level. The full resolution was brought in 2011,⁵ calling on the European Commission to adopt four priority areas (education, employment, housing and healthcare) for the proposed EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.

Unlike the previous EU policy documents, this 2011 resolution recognised “*the vital role that grass roots and performance sports*” can have for social inclusion of Roma in Europe. It remains the only policy document relating to the amelioration of the human rights situation for Roma in Europe that explicitly mentions sport as a tool for social inclusion. This idea did not materialise in any specific measures to engage Romani or Traveller people in sport, nor was it reaffirmed in subsequent policy documents on Romani inclusion.

³ European Parliament (2005) “European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union”, P6_TA(2005)0151, Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2005-0151_EN.html?redirect

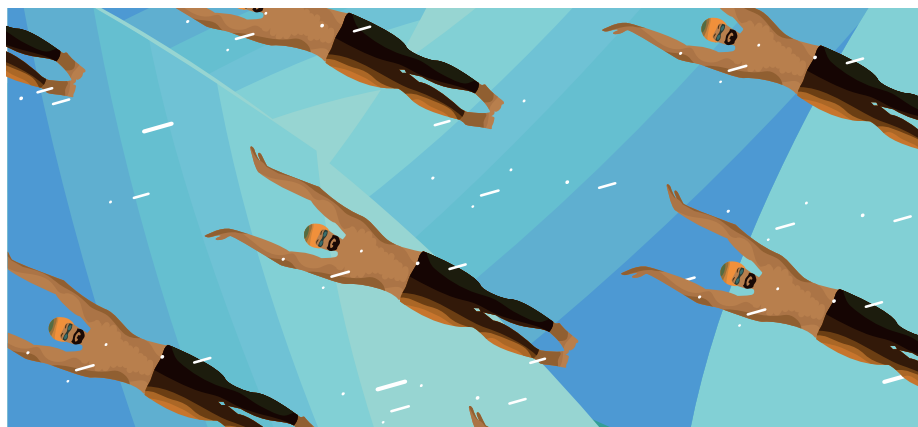
⁴ European Parliament (2006) “European Parliament resolution on the situation of Roma women in the European Union”, P6_TA(2006)0244, Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2006-0244_EN.html?redirect

⁵ European Parliament (2008) “Joint Motion for a European Parliament resolution on a European Strategy on the Roma”, RC-B6-0050/2008, Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-6-2008-0050_EN.html?redirect

EU FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

In 2011, the European Commission adopted its Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.¹ It aimed to tackle the socio-economic exclusion and discrimination faced by Roma by promoting equal access to four key areas: education, employment, health, and housing. Despite the 2011 resolution calling for “binding minimum standards at EU level”, the Framework did not include provisions to ensure conditionality of funding drawn down by member states. Its compliance mechanisms were similarly toothless, including the Race Equality Directive which the Commission’s own Fundamental Rights Agency has deemed to be “not effective” when it comes to protecting the rights of Romani EU citizens.²

The Framework ran from 2011 – 2020 and asked member states and accession countries to draft National Roma Integration Strategies concerning the four priority areas. Unlike the 2011 resolution, the final Framework document made no mention of the role of sport and physical activities in contribution to the inclusion of



Romani and Traveller individuals and communities.

The Framework was supplemented with several policy actions throughout its lifetime. In 2013, the Council of the European Union issued a “Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states”³ which focused on anti-discrimination (with special attention to the protection of Romani children and women) and poverty reduction. In 2016, the Council of the European Union in its conclusions titled “Accelerating the Process of Roma Integration”⁴ also encouraged local authorities to specially develop local action plans and policy measures to address the exclusion of Romani communities.

The final Framework document made no mention of the role of sport and physical activities in contribution to the inclusion of Romani people

1 European Commission (2011) “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020”, Document 52011DC0173, 5 April 2011, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173>

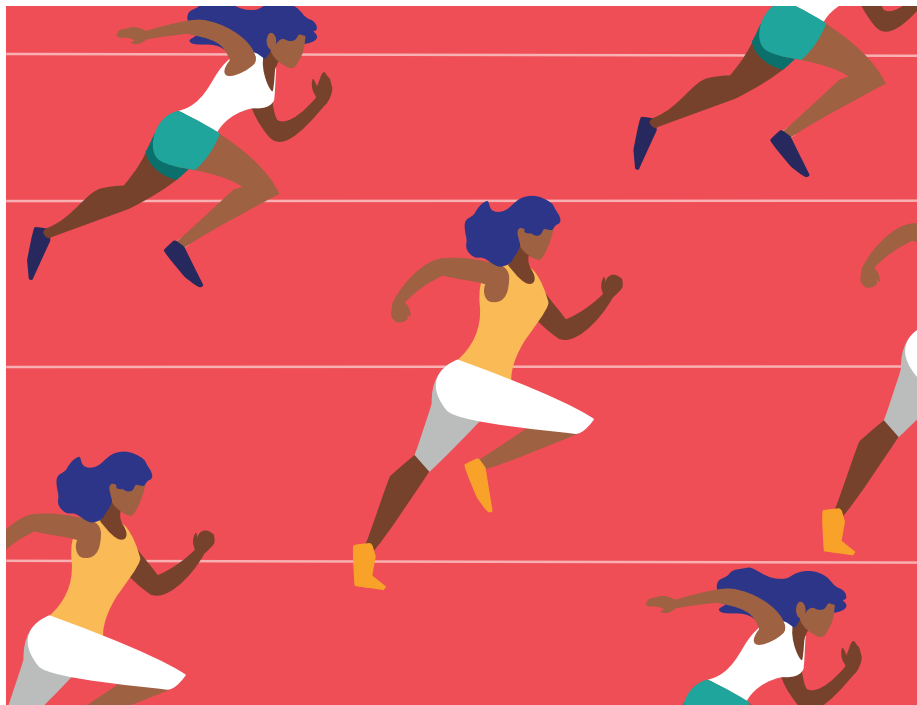
2 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) “FRA Opinions: anti-Gypsyism”, FRA Opinion No. 2, Available: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/content/fra-opinions-anti-gypsyism>

3 Official Journal of the European Union (2013) “Council Recommendation of 9 December 2013 on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States”, 2013/C 378/01, Available: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H1224\(01\)&from=en](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H1224(01)&from=en)

4 Council of the European Union (2016) “Accelerating the Process of Roma Integration - Council Conclusions (8 December 2016)”, 15406/16, Available: <https://www.reyn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CouncilConclusions08122016AcceleratingtheProcessofRomaIntegration-1.pdf>

EU ROMA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION 2020 – 2030

After the expiration of the 2011 – 2020 Framework, with little to no progress on combatting discrimination against Roma in the bloc, the European Commission adopted its new “EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation” on 7th October 2020.¹ The new Framework acknowledged the limited progress of the previous strategy over almost a decade of inaction, as well as the impacts of the COVID-10 pandemic on marginalised and excluded Romani communities.



The new Framework sets seven objectives at the EU level for the period up to 2030. This includes the four previous key areas (education, employment, housing, and health) and a three-pillar approach aimed at fostering equality, inclusion and participation. Thus, the focus on socio-economic inclusion of the previous Framework is retained, with new emphasis on the promotion of equality, the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism, and the promotion of Romani participation in political, economic, and cultural life. The Commission also added passing references to intersectionality,

to address the needs and disadvantages of the various Romani groups and multiple identities held by Romani and Traveller people.

Like the previous Framework, the new document is non-binding and lacks any enforcement mechanisms to ensure member states abide by their strategies. It lists common features and minimum commitments for all national strategies. Unlike the previous Framework, this one includes a more detailed portfolio of indicators in order to ensure more effective data collection, reporting and monitoring. The Fundamental

Rights Agency is tasked with carrying out regular surveying every four years in order to obtain current data on the progress towards the objectives. The 2020 – 2030 Framework makes no mention of the role of sport and physical activities in contribution to the inclusion of Romani and Traveller individuals and communities.

The 2020 – 2030 Framework was welcomed as an improvement on the previous EU Roma Framework and a “necessary minimum” by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) but criticised for its lack of learning from the failures of the last framework on Roma inclusion. The

¹ European Commission (2020) “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation”, COM(2020) 620, Available: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/eu_roma_strategic_framework_for_equality_inclusion_and_participation_for_2020_-_2030_0.pdf



ERRC noted the lack of inclusion of measures to address police misconduct against Roma, lack of access to justice for Romani EU citizens, and unambitious targets on the persistent segregation of Romani schoolchildren. The ‘target’ to reduce the proportion of Romani children in segregated primary education to 50% in Member States with a significant Roma population was considered a particularly egregious failure in policy.²

The Framework was reinforced with a Council Recommendation on 12th March 2021³ which replaced the previous Recommendation

“...measures to raise awareness among Roma people of primary prevention measures, such as programmes for promoting a healthy lifestyle and for the prevention of substance abuse, and to improve access to mental health services, where relevant, through health mediation.”

by the Council of 9th December 2013. This new Recommendation aimed to strengthen measures taken against hate speech, hate crimes, and violence against

Roma people. It promoted support to victims of hate crimes and favoured social inclusion policies in housing, education, employment, and health. The recommendation

² European Roma Rights Centre (2020) “New EU Roma Framework Falls Short on Police Brutality, Justice, & Segregation”, Press Release 12th October 2020, Available: <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/new-eu-roma-framework-falls-short-on-police-brutality-justice--segregation>

³ Official Journal of the European Union (2021) “Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation”, 2021/C 93/01, Available: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2021_093_R_0001&qid=1616142185824

also highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most marginalised communities in terms of the health and socio-economic impact. It reinforced the statement that antigypsyism is the root of exclusion and discrimination against Roma. It also focused on the various intersecting identities that are particularly exposed to discrimination and segregation: women, youth and children, LGBTIQ+ people, the elderly, persons with disabilities, third country nationals or stateless people, and “EU mobile Roma”. Amongst other things, the Recommendation highlighted that Roma must have access to mainstream education (with special attention to girls), employment (with attention to young people), and access to housing, healthcare, and social services (with special attention to vulnerable groups).

The Council Recommendation of 12th March 2021 is the only other Roma-related policy document since the 2011 Parliamentary Resolution for the first Framework which refers to anything resembling sports and physical activity. Section 9 (b) on “Health and access to quality healthcare and social services” generally promotes:

The Council Recommendation leaves us guessing as to what shape these measures to promote a healthy lifestyle should take. From interview responses from the European Commission’s Equality Commissioner, Helena Dalli, it is clear that the Commission sees the role of sport through the lens of education in relation to Romani and Traveller inclusion:

“Sport and physical activities must be seen as an integral part of education. Increasing access to quality inclusive education for Roma people is a sectoral objective of the EU Roma Strategic Framework and also an area where some progress has been achieved since the Commission started its work on Roma inclusion back in 2011. In addition, as part of the 2021 Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, all Member States committed to put in place measures to support participation in non-formal learning and extracurricular activities. These include youth, sport, and cultural activities within the framework of health and civic education, and other activities that enhance self-development, psychological resilience, and well-being.”¹

¹ Interview 2: Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, 7 June 2023

EU Policy

on Sports and Physical Activities

DISPARITIES IN AGE, GENDER, GEOGRAPHY, AND CLASS

Eurostat data demonstrates wide disparities in sports participation existing between EU member states. Notable exceptions aside, there is a trend towards higher participation in Northern and Western European Member States, with the lowest participation found conversely in Member States in the South and East of the continent.¹

The 2017 Eurobarometer survey² revealed wide disparities within member states along the lines of age, gender, and social class. Men exercise and participate in sports more than women across the entire European

Union. Physical activity levels have also declined among children aged 11–15, with girls being consistently less active than boys.³ While the proportion of time spent on exercise tends to decrease with age, it tends to increase with the education level of the individual. In the EU, 40.5% of highly educated people spent at least two and a half hours per week on physical activities, compared to less than a quarter (19.2%) of those with a low education level.⁴ The EU Barometer found that 46% of Europeans surveyed never participated in exercise or sport. Participation rates are consistently lower in those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities.

1 Eurostat (2019) "European Health Interview Survey: Practising sport, keeping fit or participating in recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, 2019", Available: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_sport_participation&oldid=575852

2 European Commission (2018) "Special Eurobarometer 472: Sport and physical activity", Special Eurobarometer 472 – Wave EB88.4, Available: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2164>

3 Health Policy (2018) "Promoting health-enhancing physical activity in Europe: Current state of surveillance, policy development and implementation", Volume 122, Issue 5, May 2018, Pages 519–527, Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0168851018300307?via%3Dihub>

4 Journal of Physical Education and Sport (2020) "Public sport policies and health: comparative analysis across European Union countries", Vol 20 (Supplement issue 2), Art 142, Pages 1022–1030, Available: <https://efsupit.ro/images/stories/april2020/Art%20142.pdf>



EVOLUTION OF SPORTS POLICY IN THE EU

The European Commission's Directorate General for Youth, Sport, Education, and Culture develops policy in the field of sport, fosters cooperation, and manages initiatives in support of physical activity and sport across Europe. The topic of sports and physical activity as a policy issue has developed mostly over the last decade, with member states and the EU Commission coming to view it as a tool for improving health outcomes and increasing socio-economic benefits for EU citizens. Promotion of sports and physical activity is increasingly framed in policy terms as a rainy-day-investment for member states looking to reduce government expenditure for an aging European population. There is little overt policy which directly links sports and physical activity with ethnic minority groups at all, and a complete absence of Roma and Travellers or any other minority group in policy documents.

The first policy document addressing sport in the European Union was the European Commission's 2007 "White Paper on Sport".⁵ This document was

largely concerned with the impact of sport and sport policy on young people in the Union without making specific mention of the participation of girls in sport. The White Paper does however promote the representation of women in management and leadership positions in the organisation of sport. The document recognises sport as a good tool for social inclusion and acknowledges its special role in this regard for young people, people with disabilities, and people from less privileged backgrounds. The opening introduction of the document lists racism as a principal challenge to the enjoyment of sport in Europe, however the document refers only explicitly to "migrants" once, without dealing specifically with any ethnic minority group. The Commission does use the opportunity to condemn all forms of racism in sport and makes the claim that sport involves all citizens regardless of their gender, race, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background.

In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon amended the treaties forming the constitutional basis for the European Union to introduce Article 165 TFEU, which gave the EU new competencies in the field of sport. This article recognises the educational function of sport and the EU's role in "developing the European dimension in sport, promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen."⁶

5 Commission of the European Communities (2007) "White Paper on Sport", Document 52007DC0391, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52007DC0391>

6 Official Journal of the European Union (2007) "Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007", Document I2007L/TXT, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>

DEVELOPING THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN SPORT

In 2011 the Commission issued a Communication entitled “Developing the European Dimension in Sport”⁷ which provided for specific actions regarding the societal role of sport, sport’s economic dimension, and the organisation of sport. Through this document the member states agreed that the EU agenda for sport considers, among other things, social inclusion in and through sport, with specific reference to the participation of people with disabilities as well as promoting gender equality in sport. In practice, this means the European Commission plays the role of supporting and exchanging good practices amongst member states. It also means the Commission may promote projects and networks in the sports sector.

This Communication is the first sports policy document to make explicit mention of the role of sports and physical activity in promoting social inclusion of minorities and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. The Communication also recognised that women are under-represented in sport and encouraged the mainstreaming of gender issues into sport-related activities. Through a social inclusion lens, the Communication states the Commission’s intention to support transnational projects that promote the social integration of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups through sport and the related exchange of good practice. The Communication deals with discrimination, but only in the area of professional sport;

This Communication is the first sports policy document to make explicit mention of the role of sports in promoting social inclusion of minorities and other vulnerable groups

ignoring the presence of discrimination in sport in everyday life. Even mentions of social dialogue, defined as a cornerstone of the European social model, refer only to the world of professional sports: its employers, athletes, and workers.

Based on the 2011 Communication, the Council of the European Union adopted the “Resolution on an EU Work Plan for Sport 2011-2014”⁸, promoting an EU level strategy for sport and national strategies for each member state. It makes no mention of the role of sports in regard to minority groups other than noting “it has a positive effect on social inclusion.”

PROMOTING HEALTH ENHANCED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEPA) & AN EU WORK PLAN FOR SPORT

In sport policy, the European Commission acts largely through implementation of the 2013 “Council Recommendation on promoting health enhancing physical

⁷ European Commission (2011) “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Developing the European Dimension in Sport”, Document 52011DC0012, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52011DC0012>

⁸ Council of the European Union (2011) “Resolution on a European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011-2014 [OJ C 162 of 1.6.2011]”, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/work-plan-for-sport-2011-2014.html>



activity (HEPA) across sectors”⁹. This Recommendation originated in public health policy and takes statistics on inactivity amongst EU citizens as its starting point for action. According to a 2018 study on the implementation of the HEPA Recommendation, the majority of European citizens still did not engage in sufficient, regular physical activity, with 60% never or seldom playing sport or exercising.¹⁰ The HEPA Recommendation specifically recognised that lack of physical activity is more common amongst lower socio-economic groups and encouraged member states to develop a cross-sectoral approaches involving different policy areas such as sport, health, education, environment, and transport in their national strategies and action plans.

Member states are encouraged to develop national strategies, monitor the policies, and appoint national focal points which should also facilitate the exchange of data and best practices. The Recommendation invites the Commission to support member states in all the above actions. The only mention of minority groups in relation to the strategy is found in the annex under indicator 9 which advises target groups addressed by the national HEPA policies to include “ethnic minorities etc.”

With Resolution 2020/C 419/01, the Council established a “European Union Work Plan for Sport for the period from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024”.¹¹ It sets guiding objectives aiming to ensure that EU Sports Policy is sustainable and data-based, strengthens the role of sport in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and future resilience, and fosters participation in sport and physical activity in order to promote social cohesion and active citizenship. The socio-economic dimension of sport and the promotion of participation in sport and physical activities to ameliorate such inequalities are among the priorities indicated in the document. Protection from discrimination for those working within sports is listed under the priority areas and the Work Plan explicitly aims to increase the presence of women in leadership roles and foster equal conditions (particularly in pay) for women and men working within sport. Strong media coverage and media relations are promoted as a tool to fight gender bias

⁹ Official Journal of the European Union (2013) “Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors”, 2013/C 354/01, Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:354:0001:0005:EN:PDF#:~:text=HEREBY%20RECOMMENDS%20that%20Member%20States,in%20accordance%20with%20national%20specificities>.

¹⁰ Health Policy (2018) “Promoting health-enhancing physical activity in Europe: Current state of surveillance, policy development and implementation”, Volume 122, Issue 5, May 2018, Pages 519-527, Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0168851018300307?via%3Dihub>

¹¹ Official Journal of the European Union (2020) “Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 January 2021-30 June 2024) 2020/C 419/01”, Document 42020Y1204(01), Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A42020Y1204%2801%29>

and promote participation amongst target groups. The Work Plan can be modified over time to respond to the changes and problems that arise from time to time in the sport sector. Discrimination outside of the world of professional sport is not covered in detail in the Work Plan, nor are minorities mentioned anywhere in the document.

Despite this, in interview with the ERRC, Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli stated:

“If you look at our sport policy overall, you will find that the current EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024), which is the main framework for EU policy cooperation in sport, has a strong focus on promoting access of disadvantaged people to sport and includes a range of initiatives to achieve this goal. This includes Roma, Sinti, and Travellers. Our efforts aimed at inclusion in and through sport are also geared towards them.”¹

POST-PANDEMIC SPORT POLICY

On 22nd June 2020, the “Council conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector”¹² were issued. This Council recognised the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on public health, the economy, work and social life. The document specifically took stock of how public health measures introduced by member states (social distancing, lockdowns, working from home etc.) have impacted the sports sector. In the conclusions, member states are asked to consider sport and physical activities as tools for economic and social development, as well as to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in these areas. The document makes no mention of access to sport for the most vulnerable in society, nor certain groups which may have additional needs or support such as minorities.

European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, described in interview how “*sport can help us shape our Union of Equality. It brings positive social change, more diversity and solidarity, and promotes greater cooperation to achieve equality and inclusion for all... This is why, as policymakers, we are involved in the promotion of sport, along with education professionals, regional and national experts. We are also adopting policies and supporting Member States in their endeavour to increase the role that sport can play in building inclusive societies.*”¹³

¹² Council of the European Union (2020) “Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector”, 8926/20, Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44622/st08926-en20.pdf>

¹³ Interview 2: Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, 7 June 2023

¹ Interview 2: Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, 7 June 2023



LIMITATIONS OF EU COMPETENCIES IN SPORT

As a representative of ENGSO (European Non-Governmental Sports Organisations) pointed out in interview – *“sport is still in the hands of the states. So, this EU policy and the inference it can have is, at the end of the day, quite limited in a sense.”* The main impacts the EU can have in effecting changes for better minority participation is through the financing of specific projects via the

European Commission. Interviewees from those working on sport at an EU level felt that more could be done to bring these resources to a more local, more grassroots level, as barriers to participation are highly variable across the EU for different regions and minority groups. Interviewees were also keen to point out that sport cannot be the answer to everything and should not ever be a replacement for proper inclusion strategies. ■

National Policy on Roma, Travellers, and Sport

CZECH REPUBLIC

PREVIOUS POLICY ON ROMANI INCLUSION

The Czech Republic was a member of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015, meaning the State politically committed to improving the socio-economic status and social inclusion of its Romani citizens. The government's National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion¹ focused on policies in the four target areas: employment, education, housing and health. The health section was the least developed, with only a general objective to improve the health of Roma without any reference to concrete objectives. Sport and physical activity were never considered as

tools for improving the social inclusion and health conditions of Romani people.

In September 2011, the government adopted a Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion 2011- 2015, a comprehensive document to support the social inclusion of people in 330 socially excluded localities with about 80 thousand people living in them (70 thousand being of Romani ethnicity).² The document lists 77 measures to be taken in the fields of education, employment, housing, social services, family policy, healthcare, security and regional development. This Strategy

¹ Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005) "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015: National Action Plan, Czech Republic", Available: https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunit/Czech_action_plan_engl..pdf

² Agency for Social Inclusion (2011) "Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion for the period 2011-2015", September, Available: <https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/dokument/strategy-for-combating-social-exclusion-for-the-period-2011-2015-pdf/>

defines social exclusion as a social and economic problem with a significant security dimension (rather than being a problem of discrimination). It provided for collaboration between the various ministries including that of Education, Youth and Sports. Despite the existence of

this strategy the Czech government decided to respond the European Commission's 2011 call for National Roma Integration Strategies by submitting their previous "Roma Integration Concept for 2010-2013" which was 'a plan to have a plan' without any clear measures proposed.³

WHAT DOES THE 2023 – 2030 ROMANI STRATEGY SAY ABOUT SPORT?

The most recent Czech "Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (Strategy for Roma Integration) 2021-2030"⁴ has little mention of the role of sport and physical activity other than in section 9.3.5.1 describing regional health centres and health promotion mediators. Here the strategy describes the implementation of a project to address health literacy, running from 2018 – 2023, entitled "Effective Health Support for People at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion." The project provides for 14

regional health centres, each staffed with health promotion mediators (59 in total throughout the country in 2020) who are mostly Romani themselves. The Czech strategy states most of the clients of mediators are Roma, despite the project not being explicitly designed to promote the health of the Romani minority. The mediators provide counselling, provide aid with the administration and bureaucracy of healthcare, and run physical activity and healthy lifestyle courses.

3 European Roma Rights Centre (2011) "Czech Republic: Country Profile 2011-2012", http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/czech-republic-country-profile-2011-2012.pdf

4 Office of the Government of the Czech Republic (2021) "Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (Strategy for Roma Integration) 2021-2030", April 2021, Available: https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komuniti/roma_czech_republic_strategy_en.pdf

WHAT DOES CZECH SPORT POLICY SAY ABOUT ROMA?

The Czech Republic is fully cognisant of the potential role of sport as a tool of social cohesion between intersecting groups of citizens in its policy documentation. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

included several paragraphs to this effect in its “Sports Support Concept 2016 – 2025”.¹ The document states the task of sports policy in the Czech Republic is:

“...to create conditions for physical activities of all citizens, regardless of talent, gender, age, origin, religion, as well as economic and social status, for organised and unorganised athletes.”

The Concept frames sport participation as a civic activity with the potential for intercultural education. Despite language extolling the lifelong values of “pride and patriotism”, which it claims sport instils as a necessary tonic to the “atomization of society” and “civic passivity”, the document also highlights the values of “equality and

justice” in sport. It pays particular attention to sport’s ability to combat xenophobia through actively developing a multicultural society. The Concept promises a “gradual levelling of conditions” for sport and physical activity for all citizens regardless of their talent, gender, age, origin, religion, disability, or class.

¹ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (2016) “Sport Support Concept 2016-2025 - SPORT 2025”, Available (in Czech): <https://www.msmt.cz/sport-1/koncepcie-podpory-sportu-2016-2025>

IRELAND

PREVIOUS POLICY ON TRAVELLER INCLUSION

In 2006, a ten-year framework agreement between the Irish Government and social partners, covering the period 2006 – 2015 called “Towards 2016”¹ was published. It covered several areas of social and economic development and

included several provisions relating to Travellers (Roma were not specifically covered). The Government promoted “integrated sustainable communities” in the housing section and included allocation of funding for Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes. Travellers’ needs were also mentioned in terms of education, employment, and improving communication with the general

¹ Department of the Taoiseach (2006) “Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015”, the Stationery Office Dublin, Available: https://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph_determinants/socio_economics/documents/ireland_rd01_en.pdf

population. Whilst the role of sport as a driver for social inclusion was covered, disadvantaged groups received only cursory mention and participation of Travellers was not mentioned.

The Government's "National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016"² contained

a series of measures aimed at Travellers in the fields of education, housing, health, and employment and was aimed at promoting their full participation in social life. The plan mentions migrants without specifying that some of them are Roma.

NATIONAL TRAVELLER AND ROMA INCLUSION STRATEGIES (OR LACK THEREOF)

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy for Ireland 2017 – 2021 outlines the commitments made to Traveller and Romani inclusion in Ireland during this period. The Strategy included the importance of promoting Traveller and Romani culture for the first time, and devoted space to gender equality and anti-discrimination. It also underlined the importance of Roma and Travellers

participating in political life. Sport was not a policy area considered in the 2017 – 2021 Strategy and there were no objectives relating to sport or physical activity anywhere in the plan.

Despite the EU Roma Strategic Framework calling in October 2020 for new strategies from member states, Ireland's new strategy is still in the consultation phase and has not yet been published at time of writing.

NATIONAL SPORTS POLICY

The "National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027"³ outlines the overall aims of the government regarding sport. In its introductory section

setting out the government's vision for sport policy in Ireland, the document recognises that:

"...there are a number of groups in our society that participate significantly less than the overall average. These include people with disabilities, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women and girls and ethnic minority groups, such as the Traveller community. Irish society is increasingly multi-cultural. Sport can make an important contribution to economic and social cohesion and a more integrated society by using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities, whilst emphasising the total unacceptability of racism and xenophobia."

² Government of Ireland (2006) "National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016", the Stationery Office Dublin, Available: <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPInclusionReportPDF.pdf>

³ Government of Ireland (2018) "National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027", Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Available: <https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf>

In the section concerning participation, the government dedicates Action 6 to developing initiatives to “address participation in sport among adolescents and young adults, particularly females, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, persons with a disability, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community and other ethnic minorities.” This is envisaged primarily through Sport Ireland, the statutory authority responsible for oversight and funding of sport development in the country. The document also lists National Governing Bodies for different sports, Local Sports Partnerships, Local Authorities schools, sports clubs, tertiary learning institutions, and the CARA Centre (a national pan-disability sport organisation) as being relevant parties to carry out such initiatives. The Policy encourages schools and sports clubs to foster better links to make more efficient use of their facilities, as well as local authorities who control public spaces used for sports and exercise. The importance of local authorities is stressed throughout the document, and the government asks each authority to develop a Local Sports Plan to increase participation locally. While the Policy notes that “the benefits of active participation in sport are not currently enjoyed equally by all sectors in our society”, it acknowledges that there is a deficit of statistical data on ethnic minorities participation in sport in Ireland.



The government notes that including traditionally sports-excluded social groups in Local Sports Plans “must be at the heart of our efforts if we are to achieve our policy objectives around participation”, but details on exactly how this might happen are scant. The policy document describes “extensive cooperation” across government departments and agencies and particularly spotlights the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Health, and the Health Service Executive as being essential to the process. They envisage some kind of information exchange at local level between community centres, libraries, and the post office network. However, there are no described mechanisms for how this might work and exactly what this would achieve in terms of increasing participation amongst socially disadvantaged groups.

The National Sports Policy concludes its last mention of participation of ethnic minorities in sport with the desultory and somewhat unhelpful remark that:

“There are no simple answers: the reasons for non-participation vary within and between groups, and can change over the life course.”

SPORT IRELAND POLICY

Sport Ireland (previously the Irish Sports Council) is a public statutory authority which oversees the development of sport in Ireland. Its “Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport (2022-2025)”⁴ outlines its commitments towards ensuring inclusion in sport in Ireland. The pillars of support and policy objectives towards general inclusion are more specific than the Government’s National Sports Policy, but still lacking in specific measures aimed at the increased participation of Travellers and Roma.

Sport Ireland’s policy on diversity and inclusion in sport operates across five main pillars:

- Change; through supporting the sector to understand what inclusion means at national, local, and club level and implementing practical and culture changes to bring about improvements.
- Communications; mainly by promoting programmes, initiatives and opportunities for people from diverse communities using culturally appropriate methods of communication.
- Access; by developing outreach programmes to make sport accessible to diverse communities and implementing specific measures to remove access barriers such as cost and transport.
- Capacity; through the development of resources to empower the sport sector to be able to cater for diverse communities at national and club levels.
- Leadership; principally by supporting a minimum percentage of marginalised groups in positions at board level in Sport Ireland, National Governing Bodies, and Local Sports Partnerships. This should then be expanded to local and club level.

Sport Ireland notably highlights its commitment to improve research around the participation of marginalised social groups in sport across all levels, with a stated aim of improving actions taken to increase participation. To this end, in 2020 – 2021 Sport Ireland commissioned specific research to better understand the issues relating to diversity and inclusion in sport. Amongst other barriers, it provided a snapshot of drastically low level of participation of Irish Travellers in sport and the barriers brought about by societal prejudice and racism.

⁴ Sport Ireland (2022) “Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport”, Available: <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2022-05/Sport%20Ireland%20Policy%20on%20Diversity%20and%20Inclusion%20in%20Sport.pdf>

ITALY

POLICIES OF ROMANI EXCLUSION

Policy towards Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti in Italy has historically been framed as a question of security rather than inclusion. Since the early 1990s, the so-called ‘Roma question’ has been answered by policy actions and legislation which labels Romani people as ‘nomads’ (nomadi) and securitises them as a group to be monitored as a potential disturbance to public order. This is typified by a 1991 circular named “Settlements of nomads, gypsies and non-EU citizens: supervision and control activities” (Insediamenti di nomadi, zingari ed extracomunitari: attività di vigilanza e controllo). This early policy document makes continuous reference to Roma engaging in harassing begging, palmistry, crimes against property, and drug dealing. It is not a government policy document aimed at promoting inclusion.

The historical failure of any real policy at the national level has prompted the regions to fill in the gaps with their own laws. Often these laws have the priority objective of safeguarding the language and culture of these populations on the one hand, while on the other hand considering Roma, Sinti

and Caminanti principally as ‘nomads.’ The ‘nomad’ moniker is a racialised creation of Italian society that has led to the implementation of housing policies mainly focused on segregating Romani people in so-called ‘nomad camps’ (campi nomadi).

On 21 May 2008, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi declared a State of Emergency¹ in five Italian regions (Lazio, Campania, Lombardy, Piedmont, and Veneto) in response to “the extremely critical situation” caused by the “presence of nomadic camps”.²

The Decree, commonly dubbed the “nomad emergency”, afforded state authorities with extraordinary powers to profile, control, and harass Romani people in Italy. It signalled the start of a public policy direction which effectively declared war on Roma and immigrants through police harassment³, illegal detentions⁴, fingerprinting of children⁵, forced evictions⁶, and deportations.⁷

1 Renata Goldirova (2008) “Italy extends state of emergency over immigration”, EU Observer, 28 July 2008, Available: <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/26551>

2 Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (2008) “Dichiarazione dello stato di emergenza in relazione agli insediamenti di comunità nomadi nel territorio delle regioni Campania, Lazio e Lombardia”, 21 May 2008, Available (in Italian): https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2008-05-26&atto.codiceRedazionale=08A03712&elenco30giorni=false

3 Isabella Clough Marinaro (2008) “Italy’s shame”, The Guardian, 11 April 2008, Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/apr/11/italysshame>

4 European Roma Rights Centre, Idea Rom Onlus, Opera Nomadi (2011) “Parallel Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women on Italy”, 29 July 2011, Available: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/italy-cedaw-submission-24-june-2011.pdf

5 Stephen Brown (2008) “Italy blasted on plan to fingerprint Roma children”, Reuters, 26 June 2008, Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-italy-roma-idUKL2635616820080626>

6 Amnesty International (2012) “Italy: On the edge: Roma, forced evictions and segregation in Italy”, September 12, 2012 Index Number: EUR 30/010/2012, Available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur30/010/2012/en/>

7 Spiegel International (2008) “Italy Cracks Down on Illegal Immigrants”, 16 May 2008, Available: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/roma-raids-italy-cracks-down-on-illegal-immigrants-a-553753.html>



This targeting of Roma using the combined weight of the state security apparatus lasted until a 2011 State Council decision declared the state of emergency as “unfounded, unmotivated and unlawful.”⁸ A 2013 Court of Cassation judgment⁹ reaffirmed the

decision and declared that the state of emergency was contrary to domestic laws as well as a number of international laws, not least the European Convention on Human Rights.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE INCLUSION OF ROMA, SINTI AND CAMINANTI

On 24th February 2012, the Italian Government approved its first “National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti” following consultation between the Italian Equality Body (UNAR - National Office Against Racial Discrimination), Italian Romani Federations, Sinti and Caminanti groups, international human rights NGOs, and other organisations. The Strategy is required, as in all EU member states, following the adoption of the EU Framework for National Strategies for Roma Integration up to 2020. The Italian Strategy targeted the four areas indicated in the EU Framework (education, employment, housing, and health) and emphasised the need to overcome previous emergency responses to the situation of Roma in a coordinated manner. The

document did not pay adequate attention to anti-discrimination measures in relation to its four main areas. While discrimination was mentioned in the Strategy, there is no dedicated section relating to how it manifests or how it should be combated. Violence against Romani people is only mentioned in passing, and the phenomenon of antigypsyism is only loosely described. The Strategy did not allocate specific budget lines to carry out anti-discrimination measures.

The Strategy, while marking a significant improvement from the policies of the nomad emergency, remained largely unimplemented in the country. The Strategy did not deal with sport as tool of integration the prospect of better health conditions for Romani people in Italy.

⁸ Amnesty International (2012) “Briefing to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”, 80th Session, February 2012, Available: https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/AI_Italy_CERD80.pdf

⁹ European Roma Rights Centre (2013) “End of the Road for Italy’s Illegal State of Emergency”, 2 May 2013, Available: <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/end-of-the-road-for-italys-illegal-state-of-emergency>

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF ROMA AND SINTI 2021 – 2030

Italy has adopted its “National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti 2021-2030” in accordance with the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 12 March 2021 (2021/C 93/01). UNAR consulted various stakeholders such as the members of the National Platform¹⁰ and various government institutions involved. The new Strategy has learned from some of the gaps in the previous plan and operates on three main pillars: the fight against antigypsyism, combating multigenerational poverty, and increasing the social and political participation of Roma and Sinti. The new document also underlines the lack of socio-demographic and economic statistical information.

The Strategy recognises the scale of the challenge in fighting antigypsyism in that a full 47% of Italians think that the Romani people are thieves or criminals, with a further 35% considering them as “nomads”. According to data from UNAR, a significant number of cases of discrimination are recorded against Roma and Sinti on social media, making the

Romani minority one of the most exposed to online hate speech. The fight against antigypsyism pillar cuts across all four axes (education, health, work, and housing), and the Strategy acknowledges the extent of antigypsyism present in the public sphere, particularly in access to housing.

In education, the new Strategy aims, among other things, at interventions at a family and school level including linguistic and cultural mediation, training of teachers and school staff, and making sure that school programs also reflect the presence of Roma and Sinti in European history and culture. On the other hand, there are no proposed actions involving young people in sporting activities in this area.

In the section dedicated to health, the social marginalisation of Roma and Sinti is seen as a contributing factor to poor health outcomes, combined with unhealthy lifestyles and behaviours. The training of social and health personnel is proposed, as is promoting health education which, again, does not consider sporting activities as a tool of inclusion.

¹⁰ The national platform is a national emanation of the European Roma Platform promoted by the European Community. It is an operational tool for dialogue between UNAR, civil society, Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti associations, and the central and local public administrations involved in the strategy.

SPORT POLICY

In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport presented its “Policy Act for the three-year period 2020-2022”.¹¹ This document, among other things, invited the National Sports Federations to contribute to improving the condition of young people and strengthen schools’ capacities as a place to fight against marginalisation, promote cultural inclusion, and prevent and combat all forms of discrimination,

violence, and racial hatred. Sport is explicitly considered as a tool to promote social and territorial cohesion in Italy. The policy act was followed by a decree allocating funds for programs aimed at “promoting the practice of sport, also in order to encourage the values of equal opportunities, the fight against all forms of discrimination and increase the integration of the disabled, ethnic minorities, immigrant and other vulnerable groups.”¹²

SPORT AND INCLUSION IN POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Following the national emergency declared during the COVID-19 pandemic, the “General Directives for the administrative action and management of the Department of Sport”¹³ identified the programmatic direction of the Government as part of its post-pandemic recovery plans. The Directives document considers the need for investments to relaunch sport. Italy’s recovery and growth is seen as closely linked to the reduction of gaps and inequalities. For this reason, strategic area three of the Directives document deals with interventions in favour of social and territorial inclusion and cohesion policies. Furthermore, it establishes that

the Department for Sport can partially reimburse the expenses incurred by public or private entities, which have a non-profit purpose, for the realisation of cultural or social projects of high importance.

Sport and social inclusion are included in Italy’s pandemic recovery plans; by June 2026, 100 interventions for national sport facilities are expected to be implemented with included targets on the inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalised individuals. However, there is no mention at national level of any ethnic minorities as targets to be specifically involved in sporting activities.

¹¹ Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2020) “Act of Address for the institutional action of “Sport and Health Spa” for the year 2020 and the three-year period 2020-2022”, Minister for Youth Policies and Sport, 0025975, 18 May 2020, Available (in Italian): <https://www.sport.governo.it/media/2165/atto-di-indirizzo-sport-e-salute-22-aprile-2020.pdf>

¹² Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2020) “Decree Implementing the EPS Fund”, 0048816, 18 November 2020, Available (in Italian): <https://www.sport.governo.it/media/2376/decreto-attuativo-fondo-eps.pdf>

¹³ Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2022) “General Directives for the administrative action and management of the Department of Sport”, Undersecretary of State, Available (in Italian): <https://www.sport.governo.it/media/3784/direttiva-generale-per-lazione-amministrativa-e-la-gestione-del-dipartimento-per-lo-sport-anno-2022.pdf>

SPAIN

POST-FRANCO POLICY ON ROMANI INCLUSION

Romani people in Spain do not enjoy special recognition as a national minority and modern policy has tended to focus more on the promotion of culture and political participation rather than engaging in actions to ameliorate unequal access to human rights. Despite this, Spain's history of funded pro-Roma policy begins earlier than most. In the post-fascist period, the first Romani focussed policy came just four years after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco Bahamonde. The government created a special Inter-Ministerial Commission in 1979 to study problems affecting Romani people. Six years later, in 1985 the first "National Plan for Roma Development" was published and was accompanied for the first time by special provision in the state budget to finance Romani inclusion measures. Then in 1989, the Government published its "Roma Development Plan" which included its own separate budget.¹

In 2005, Royal Decree 891/2005 created the State Council of the Gypsy People², promoting the participation of Romani associations in Spanish public life. The Council is a consultative and advisory body attached to the Ministry of Social

Rights. Among other functions, it proposes measures for the promotion of the inclusion of Romani people, advises on development plans, issues reports, and promotes studies on projects and programs.³

In 2010, the Government approved its first "Action Plan for the Development of the Roma Population 2010-2012"⁴ which aimed to improve conditions for Romani people and promote their full enjoyment of access to rights and to goods and services. Equal treatment and non-discrimination were included as a priority area in the Plan, and prejudice was considered the main obstacle to social inclusion with the media highlighted as a main conduit for spreading a stereotyped image of Romani people in Spain. Particular attention was paid to the multiple discrimination faced by Romani individuals when their ethnic origin is combined with factors such as disability, gender, or nationality. The Plan noted that amongst the Romani population the rate of educational failure is much higher, access to secondary education is lower, and the number of dropouts is elevated. Proposals included normalising the enrolment of Romani people at all levels of education and promoting Romani culture better

1 Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2019) "A History of the Roma Associative Movement in Spain", RomArchive, 26 January 2019, Available: <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/history-roma-associative-movement-spain/>

2 Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2006) "Equality and the Roma Community in 2006", Discrimination and the Roma Community FSG 2007 Annual Report, Available: <https://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/discriminacion07English/pdf/02.pdf>

3 Ministry of Social Rights (2005) "State Council of the Gypsy People (CEPG)", Available (Spanish): <https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/poblacion-gitana/consejo-estatal-del-pueblo-gitano.htm>

4 Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality (2010) "Action plan for the development of the Roma population (2010-2012)", Available: <https://docplayer.net/16616985-Action-plan-for-the-development-of-the-roma-population-2010-2012.html>

within schools. There is no mention of the role of sport in education as a tool to promote inclusion.

The Plan underlined that social exclusion has a direct impact on the health of Romani people in Spain. The need to promote

healthy eating and physical activity is also indicated through the “Strategy on Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Strategy” (NOAS)⁵ developed by the Spanish Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition. It does not explicitly mention sport as a tool of inclusion.

NATIONAL ROMANI INCLUSION STRATEGIES

Spain’s “National Integration Strategy 2012-2020”⁶ was adopted to comply with the EU Framework up until 2020. The Strategy overlapped with the plan until 2012 so the starting data and objectives did not differ hugely. The health section included measures contained in the plan and it reiterated the promotion of lifelong health, without any specific measures concerning sport and physical activity.

The new “National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation in Spain (2021-2030)”⁷ implements the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 12 March 2021 (2021/C 93/01). It aims to continue the policies and measures in the Plan and the previous Strategy with additional emphasis on discrimination and gender equality. The new strategy has three axes:

- Social Inclusion (Employment, Education, Housing and Essential

Services, Health Services, Poverty and Social exclusion, and the digital divide);

- Equal Opportunity and Social Discrimination (Antigypsyism, Gender Equality and Empowerment of Romani women, Non-discrimination, Promotion and Recognition of Romani Culture);
- Participation and Empowerment (Participation of Roma and the Romani Association Movement).

The new Strategy foresees both actions that must be put into practice by the central administration and others which are allocated to the regional autonomous regions and local institutions. At the local level, importance is given, among other things, to physical activity and healthy eating. Various projects are foreseen to raise awareness among Romani communities on the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Sport as a tool of inclusion and healthy lifestyle is not included at a national level.

5 Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs (2005) “Spanish strategy for nutrition, physical activity and prevention of obesity (NAOS)”, Available: <https://extranet.who.int/nutrition/gina/en/node/8402>

6 European Commission (2012) “National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain 2012 – 2020”, Available: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2018-08/roma_spain_strategy_en_1.pdf

7 Government of Spain (2021) “National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021 – 2030”, Available: https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/poblacion-gitana/docs/estrategia_nacional/Estrategia_nacional_21_30/Estrategia_aprob_cm_2_nov_ENGLISH.pdf

HEALTH POLICY ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The 2022 Public Health Strategy⁸ recognises that one of the factors that influences the health of individuals is lifestyle, as well as economic, social, and economic factors. For this reason, it promotes a healthy lifestyle by disseminating information on physical activity that is beneficial to health and promoting physical activity, active mobility,

and reduction of sedentary lifestyles.⁹ The Strategy recognises that Romani people suffer from major inequalities in the area of health because of the discrimination they suffer, but refers to the Strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma 2021-2030 for solutions. It does not link sport and physical activity as a solution to exclusion and discrimination.

ROMANI AND SPORT POLICY IN THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES

The political competence to create specific plans for the Romani population in relation to sport and inclusion lies largely with the different autonomous communities and cities. There are 17 autonomous communities that do not have a Romani inclusion strategy (Asturias, Aragon, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Castilla-La Mancha, Murcia, Navarra and La Rioja, as well as the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla). The remaining 8 that have created inclusion strategies are included below, as well as the degree to which they include sport as a tool to promote non-discrimination and social inclusion.

ANDALUCÍA

Andalusia stands out as one of the few regions with specific objectives and actions targeting sports in the Romani community. The implementation of these measures aims to promote sports participation amongst adult Romani people living in peripheral neighbourhoods, thereby fostering their physical and mental well-being.

Andalusia's "Comprehensive Plan for the Promotion of Sports in the Romani Community"¹⁰ was published in 2017 and was implemented until 2020 (a follow-up plan has not been published yet). The actions related to sports are included in point 4, which focuses on health. Within this section, there is a specific objective (4.1.1) to:

8 Ministry of Health (2022) "Estrategia de Salud Pública 2022", Available (in Spanish): https://www.sanidad.gob.es/en/ciudadanos/pdf/Estrategia_de_Salud_Publica_2022.pdf

9 https://www.sanidad.gob.es/en/ciudadanos/pdf/Estrategia_de_Salud_Publica_2022.pdf

10 Junta de Andalucía (2017) "Plan Integral para la Inclusión de la Comunidad Gitana de Andalucía 2017-2020", Inclusión Social, Juventud, Familias e Igualdad, Available (in Spanish): <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/organismos/transparencia/planificacion-evaluacion-estadistica/planes/detalle/133404.html>

“Initiate sports practice among the adult Romani population residing in peripheral neighbourhoods. This objective includes the following actions:

- Promote non-competitive recreational sports events in municipal spaces located in Zones with Social Transformation Needs, where there is a significant presence of the Romani population.
- To drive intercultural coexistence activities involving both Romani and non-Romani populations through sports.”

BASQUE COUNTRY

In the Basque Country, the “Basque Strategy for the Romani People 2022-2026”¹¹ was published in 2022 and is being implemented until 2026. The plan does not make any specific reference to sports or physical activity beyond discussing healthy habits, which include sports as an inseparable component.

CASTILLA Y LEÓN

In Castilla Y León, the “Program of Strategic Actions with the Romani Population”¹² was published in 2021 and is being implemented until 2030. This Autonomous Community specifically proposes the promotion of participation of Romani individuals in culture and society

by encouraging them in “the involvement of young people in sports, cultural, and leisure associations, as well as in those organisations that carry out volunteering and solidarity activities.” However, in the section on health there is no reference to sports as a tool to improve the lives of Romani people.

CATALONIA

Catalonia has a “Comprehensive Plan for the Romani People 2017 – 2020”,¹³ later extended to 2022 by the Catalan authorities (a follow-up plan has not yet been published).¹⁴ In the health section, there is a specific objective to:

- “Increase the number of Romani children practising healthy habits in their diet and physical activity. Within this objective, a specific action (3.1) is proposed:
- Conduct an analysis (report) on the situation of healthy habits in the diet, physical activity, and leisure of Romani families, with particular attention to “sleep hours and sedentary and/or active leisure activities of Roma children.”

11 Eusko Jaurlaritz (2022) “Basque Strategy for the Romani People 2022-2026”, Administración de la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco. Departamento de Igualdad, Justicia y Políticas Sociales, 1 March 2022, Available (Spanish): https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/noticia/xileg_planes_departamentales/es_def/Estrategia_Vasca_con_el_Pueblo_Gitano_2022_2026.pdf

12 Junta de Castilla y León (2021) “Programa de Actuaciones Estratégicas con la Población Gitana en Castilla y León 2021-2030”, Servicios Sociales de Castilla y León, Available (in Spanish) : <https://serviciossociales.jcyl.es/web/es/servicios-sociales-innovacion/programa-actuaciones-estrategicas-poblacion.html>

13 Generalitat de Catalunya (2017) “Pla integral del poble gitano a Catalunya 2017-2020”, Departament de Treball, Afers Socials i Famílies, Available (in Catalan): https://dretssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/01departament/05plansactuacio/poble-gitano/Pla_integral_poble_gitano_catalunya_2017_2020.pdf

14 Generalitat de Catalunya (2022) “ACORD GOV/80/2022, de 19 d’abril, pel qual s’aprova la pròrroga del Pla integral del poble gitano a Catalunya 2017-2020, per al període 2021-2022”, Diari Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Available (in Catalan) : <https://dogc.gencat.cat/ca/document-del-dogc/?documentId=925820>

EXTREMADURA

In this Autonomous Community, there was an “Extremadura Plan for the Promotion and Participation of the Roma Population from 2007 to 2020”.¹⁵ There is no indication of a follow up plan.

The 2007 – 2020 plan did not make any reference to physical activity or sports as a health tool, and therefore, no specific actions were established to promote sports among the Romani population.

GALICIA

The Galician “Plan for the Integration of the Roma Population in Galicia 2014 - 2020”¹⁶ only mentioned “supporting Romani associations that promote culture and sports.” Therefore, it delegates the responsibility of promoting sports as a healthy habit in this Autonomous Community to Romani associations and NGOs without any indication of measures or indicators to monitor progress. There is no indication of a follow-up plan.

MADRID

In the case of the Community of Madrid, there is a positive reference to the current situation of the Romani population regarding sports. In Madrid’s “Action Plan for the Romani Population 2017 - 2021”¹⁷, while acknowledging that “health problems among the Romani population tend to be greater than in the general

population,” the autonomous authorities propose measures to address this issue that have nothing to do with physical activity or sports. The only further mention of the topic is to emphasise without additional qualification that the Romani population has “good access to sports facilities.” A follow-up plan has not yet been published.

VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

In the Valencian Community, the “Valencian Strategy for Equality and Inclusion of the Romani People”¹⁸ was published in 2018 and is being implemented until 2023. In this strategy, sports and physical activity are mentioned in section 1.8.4 “Promotion of educational leisure activities” with a specific line of action that states the objective to “carry out information and awareness campaigns about the existing leisure and sports alternatives in the neighbourhoods where the Romani population lives.” In the section of the strategy addressing actions to end segregation, it proposes funding agreements to, among other things, improve access to sports areas (4.4.3.2). ■

15 Junta de Extremadura (2007) “Extremadura Plan for the Promotion and Participation of the Roma Population from 2007 to 2020”, Available: <https://www.aecgit.org/downloads/documentos/550/plan-extremeno-para-la-promocion-y-participacion-de-la-poblacion-gitana.pdf>

16 Xunta de Galicia (2014) “Estrategia de Inclusión Social de la población gitana en Galicia 2014-2020”, Consellería de Política Social e Xuventude, Available (in Spanish) : <https://politicassocial.xunta.gal/es/recursos/publicaciones/estrategia-de-inclusion-social-de-la-poblacion-gitana-en-galicia-2014-2020>

17 Comunidad de Madrid (2017) “Estrategia de Inclusión Social de la Población Gitana de la Comunidad de Madrid 2017-2021”, Consejería de Familia, Juventud y Asuntos Sociales, Available (in Spanish) : <https://www.comunidad.madrid/transparencia/informacion-institucional/planes-programas/estrategia-inclusion-social-poblacion-gitana-comunidad>

18 Generalitat Valenciana (2018) “Estrategia Valenciana para la Igualdad y la Inclusión del Pueblo Gitano 2018 – 2023”, Comisión Delegada del Consell para la Inclusión y los Derechos Sociales, Available (in Spanish): <https://inclusio.gva.es/documents/610460/167669731/ESTRATEGIA+VALENCIANA+PARA+LA+IGUALDAD+Y+LA+INCLUSI%C3%93N+DEL+PUEBLO+GITANO+2018-2023/6b78937d-d25b-40b8-9fb3-5a9f6d46cefa>



Barriers to Participation

IN SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ROMA & TRAVELLERS

THE SHEER EXTENT OF ANTIGYPSYISM IN EUROPE

Before looking at the country-based specificities that prevent Romani and Traveller people from participating in sport and physical activity, it is necessary to situate these inequalities in the wider context of antigypsyism in Europe today. The situation for many Romani and Traveller communities across Europe is one characterised by marginalisation and segregation. The degree of exclusion and discrimination faced by these communities is without comparison anywhere in Europe in regard to the scale of the problem and the great variety of human rights abuses experienced by these ethnic groups.

Education and unemployment

According to an 11 country Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) study¹ into access to education, 14% of the Romani children of compulsory school age in the households surveyed were not enrolled in formal educational institutions, compared to 3% of the non-Roma children living close by. Additionally, 89% of the Romani people surveyed aged 18 to 24 had not

acquired any upper secondary qualification compared to 38% of non-Roma living close by.

The EU-MIDIS II results in 2016 demonstrated that Romani children lagged behind their non-Romani peers on all educational indicators. Only about half (53%) of Romani children between the age of four and the starting age of compulsory primary education participate in early childhood education. The proportion of Romani early school-leavers is disproportionately high compared with the general population.

In many localities, Romani children are segregated from their non-Romani peers either in different classrooms or through the process of “white flight” leading to Roma-only or Roma-majority schools. In most cases, the quality of education that Romani children receive in a segregated setting is inferior to that of integrated learning environments. For those living in marginalised, racially isolated communities,

¹ Fundamental Rights Agency (2014) “Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States.” Available: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-roma-survey-dif-education-1_en.pdf

access to education of any kind is often lacking, with girls being disproportionately affected (as worldwide, communities living in poverty tend to favour educating boys over girls).

The knock-on effect of spatial and educational segregation is inadequate opportunities to access the labour market. Romani people living in racially isolated communities are regularly living in areas far from any employment opportunities. Inadequate educational outcomes mean they are likely to be unqualified for what few employment opportunities there are. Those few who are both qualified and able to apply for these few jobs find themselves locked out by discrimination in the labour market from potential employers. Once again Romani women are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon. The proportion of young Roma women (16-24 years) who are neither in work nor in education or training considerably exceeds the corresponding rate for young Romani men in most EU Member States surveyed by FRA in 2018.

Poor housing and infrastructure

Discrimination against Roma and Travellers in access to quality housing is pervasive throughout Europe. Forced evictions and demolitions of homes take place at crisis levels across multiple countries, without provision of adequate alternative accommodation for those evicted. The living conditions which many Romani people are forced to endure are akin to those of the poorest in developing nations. Particularly in racially isolated communities, many lack not only access to clean water and electricity, but also basic sewage, sanitation, and indoor plumbing according to the Council of Europe² and Roma Civil Monitor reports.³ Poor living conditions which hinder access to

fundamental rights also persist in Western European nations, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency's *Roma and Travellers in Six Countries* report.⁴

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency's Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II),⁵ 80% of Roma interviewed live at risk of poverty compared with a European Union average of 17%. The survey found that 30% of Roma live in households with no tap water and 46% have no indoor toilet, shower, or bathroom. According to ERRC research carried out in seven European countries on access to water for Roma, the burden of collecting water from non-municipal water sources falls mainly on women and girls.⁶

Environmental injustices such as these contribute to additional inequalities and rights abuses for Romani communities. The common lack of state provided household waste collection to segregated communities, means the ensuing environmental degradation can serve as a flash point for state intervention through police officers, municipality workers, and social workers. Romani communities are forced to burn waste (such as waste plastics, electronic goods and tyres illegally transported from overseas and dumped in their areas) in order to survive.⁷ This risks the health of the Romani community and also creates tensions with non-Romani neighbours and later state authorities. Poor investment in infrastructure and services in Romani and Traveller neighbourhoods means they are frequently set up to fail by local municipalities.

Health and access to public services

Romani and Traveller people in Europe have a life expectancy that is on average 10 – 15 years shorter

2 Council of Europe (2018) *"Roma and Travellers: Housing,"* Available: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/housing>

3 Roma Civil Monitor. "A synthesis of civil society's reports on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies in the European Union." Center for Policy Studies Central European University. August 2018, pp. 30-32. Available: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-synthesis27-2017-eprint-fin-2.pdf>.

4 Fundamental Rights Agency (2020) *"Roma and Travellers in Six Countries."* Available: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2020/roma-and-travellers-survey-europe-needs-break-vicious-circle-poverty-and-discrimination>

5 European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II): Roma – selected findings report." Available: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

6 European Roma Rights Centre (2017) "Thirsting for Justice: Europe's Roma Denied Access to Clean Water & Sanitation." Available: <http://www.EuropeanRomaRightsCentre.org/reports-and-submissions/thirsting-for-justice-new-report-reveals-depth-of-discrimination-faced-by-europes-roma-in-accessing-water>

7 British Broadcasting Corporation (2021) *"British Waste Dumped in Romania"* Available <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFjsL61qi3g>

Romani woman from a marginalised community who is also a lesbian may face discrimination for being Romani, but which also targets her for her sex, her class, and her sexuality.



than the general population, according to a study by the European Public Health Alliance.⁸ The causes are general poor health brought about by unhealthy living conditions, a higher infant mortality rate, poor access to health insurance, and discrimination in healthcare, which leads to a lack of preventative care. Frequently, Romani people living in racially isolated communities have no immediate access to healthcare facilities in the vicinity. It is not unheard of for paramedic services to be disproportionately delayed when called to Roma-majority neighbourhoods, or on occasions not to arrive at all.⁹ Discrimination and racial abuse also occurs within healthcare settings, particularly against Romani women who in several countries have faced abusive behaviour and hate speech from medical practitioners.¹⁰

Over-representation of Roma and Travellers in child state care

Throughout Europe, Romani and Traveller children are over-represented in state care systems due to a disproportionate number of children being removed from Romani and Traveller families. In some regions, as many as 80% of all children in state care are of Romani ethnicity.¹¹ Throughout much of Central

and Eastern Europe, children's institutions exist in place of family or community-based care solutions. Institutionalisation has devastating emotional and developmental effects on children, and results in Romani and Traveller care leavers being doubly stigmatised: on account of their ethnicity and being 'an institution child.' Poor housing conditions and child poverty remain the most frequent reasons for removing Romani and Traveller children from their biological families, despite this practice being illegal.¹² Reports of neglect and even abuse of Romani children in care institutions are not uncommon across many European states.¹³

Intersectional discrimination

Intersectional discrimination is the concept that a person or persons can face discrimination on the basis of more than one protected characteristic or visible marker of identity, often simultaneously. Usually this means the discrimination is compounded by the presence of more than one characteristic: e.g., a Romani woman from a marginalised community who is also a lesbian may face discrimination for being Romani, but which also targets her for her sex, her class, and her sexuality.

8 European Public Health Alliance (2018) "Closing the life expectancy gap of Roma in Europe." Available: <https://epha.org/closing-the-life-expectancy-gap-of-roma-in-europe/>.

9 European Roma Rights Centre (2020) "Romani man dies while paramedics stall at the outskirts of the 'poorest village in Hungary'", Available: <http://www.errc.org/news/romani-man-dies-while-paramedics-stall-at-the-outskirts-of-the-poorest-village-in-hungary>

10 Annex 5: Discriminatory Treatment of Roma and Sinti in Healthcare

11 Chance for Children Foundation, European Roma Rights Centre (2017) "Cause of Action: Romani Children in State Care in Nógrád County (Hungary).", Available: <http://www.errc.org/reports-and-submissions/cause-of-action-romani-children-in-state-care-in-nograd-county-hungary>

12 European Roma Rights Centre (2021) "Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care." Available: <http://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/blighted-lives-romani-children-in-state-care>

13 Travellers' Times (2021) "Europe's Silent Scandal: Romani Children In State Care Institutions", Available: <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/features/europes-silent-scandal-romani-children-state-care-institutions>

The general imbalance in equality when it comes to issues of sex and gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and age are equally present when it comes to the marginalisation and discrimination of Romani and Traveller people. In particular, the deficit of rights is felt greater by Romani women and girls, who are usually disproportionately affected by rights abuses. Notably in access to education, healthcare, and social services they face additional direct discrimination on account of the intersection between their ethnicity and their gender. This is also true in issues of exclusion and indirect discrimination. For example, in marginalised communities, which have inadequate access to basic infrastructure such as running water, the burden of fetching water falls disproportionately to women and girls.^{14 15}

The mere existence of racially isolated Romani and Traveller communities living in deep poverty embodies the intersection of ethnicity and class. These people face many of the same aspects of discrimination as Roma and Travellers who are not living in such places, with the additional hardship of racialised poverty. For LGBTQ+ Roma and Travellers, they face the same societal prejudices as other LGBTQ+ people with the compounded factor of racism.

Discrimination as a Threat to Life & Property

The exclusion and segregation many Romani and Traveller communities face compounds the human rights abuses perpetrated against them, both in terms of institutional racism and hate crimes. The cyclical relationship between discrimination, poverty, and exclusion exacerbates existing inequalities and increases the likelihood of further discrimination

occurring. This situation, compounded over multiple generations, becomes more ingrained with the passing of each generation, as inequalities deepen, societal views become entrenched, and institutional racism becomes normalised.

A political and social narrative that focuses on erroneous negative stereotypes of Roma and Travellers creates an atmosphere in which continued discrimination in social inclusivity, citizenship, and access to social security is seen as acceptable in wider society. Discrimination in education, housing, and employment creates a poverty cycle.¹⁶ Children born into impoverished Romani and Traveller families are unable to access quality education which could assist in them gaining substantive, good-quality employment to negate their poverty¹⁷ and establish themselves as active citizens.¹⁸ Anti-Roma and anti-Traveller narratives and discrimination in turn can lead to hate speech and incitement to violence against Romani and Traveller communities by creating an atmosphere of impunity that allows challenges to human security to arise, such as assaults and attacks on property. Hate incidents and hate crimes further compound the existing challenges that many members of society already face in terms of other personal or social characteristics such as gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation, enhancing vulnerability further.

Roma living in segregated neighbourhoods can face political coercion in the form of direct threats from political actors during election periods. Intimidation through threats to lose jobs, remove children, or even through violence by local enforcers are used to compel members of Romani communities to vote for certain political representatives.¹⁹

14 European Roma Rights Centre (2017) "Thirsting for Justice: Europe's Roma Denied Access to Clean Water and Sanitation." Available: <http://www.errc.org/reports-and-submissions/thirsting-for-justice-new-report-reveals-depth-of-discrimination-faced-by-europes-roma-in-accessing-water>

15 European Public Health Alliance (2021) "Access to Water – a major driver of health inequalities for Roma," Available: <https://epha.org/access-to-water-a-major-driver-of-health-inequalities-for-roma/>

16 International Labour Organization (2017) Cutting the cycle of poverty and marginalization of Roma youth, Available: https://www.ilo.org/budapest/information-resources/videos/WCMS_541628/lang--en/index.htm

17 European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018) Transition from education to employment of young Roma in nine EU Member States, Available: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/transition-education-employment-young-roma-nine-eu-member-states>

18 Pajic, C.M. (2009) Roma as active citizens, closing the gap between political elites and local communities, Available: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Catherine-Pajic-Roma-Chapter.pdf>

19 EU Monitor (2014) "Threat of voter fraud haunts EU vote in Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia". Available: https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vji6dtqecvxxz?ctx=vgaxlcljz&start_tab0=60



CZECH REPUBLIC:

BARRIERS TO ROMANI SPORTS PARTICIPATION



An estimated 250,000 Roma live in the Czech Republic.¹ Roma are recognised amongst the 12 official national minorities, but are excluded from Czech society and their current human rights situation is a cause for serious concern. International bodies and civil society highlight segregation in education, women's rights abuses, and children's rights abuses as major areas of concern. The prevalence of hate speech across the political sphere and online against Roma, as well as violent attacks against Roma and their property and the perceived impunity of police officers in high profile cases of brutality against Roma, creates an environment in which sports participation becomes an irrelevance for the majority of Romani communities.

Spatial segregation

Many Romani communities in the Czech Republic live in segregated neighbourhoods or areas which are frequently far from facilities, or even safe environments, where they could participate in sport or physical activities. The most recent monitoring report from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) describes the situation of these communities as "still characterised by a vicious circle of under-education, leading to limited opportunities in the labour market, and frequent de-facto residential segregation, which also has a negative impact on access to health care and other social services."²

Structural barriers to participation in sport were commonly brought up by interviewees from the Czech Republic, notably in the lack of transport options available to Roma from marginalised communities. This was described both in terms of the costs associated with public or private transport as well as in many cases the complete lack of public transport availability for Roma living in segregated living spaces. Public bus lines commonly do not serve segregated Romani communities, with Romani children sometimes being forced to walk dangerous routes along roads and other obstacles in order to reach a bus stop to attend school. Under such circumstances, access to organised sport outside of the segregated area becomes much more difficult for Roma.

¹ Romea (2022) "Czech census sees 65 % rise in number of people declaring Romani nationality", Available: <https://romea.cz/en/czech-republic/czech-census-sees-63-rise-in-number-of-people-declaring-romani-nationality>

² European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2020) "ECRI Report on the Czech Republic (Sixth Monitoring Cycle)", Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-6th-report-on-the-czech-republic/1680a0a086>

A social worker working with a local civil society organisation described how children from the Romani community in the town of Rotava are “*mostly idle and gather in groups.*” With no square or space where they can spend leisure time together, they spend their time hanging around on the streets where the town’s police, municipal officers, and four ‘crime prevention assistants’ harass them, issue fines, and generally increase ethnic tensions.³

Racialised poverty

Poverty in the Czech Republic operates largely on ethnic lines, with a direct link between risk of poverty and ethnicity. With racialised spatial segregation comes racialised poverty, and socio-economic barriers to accessing sport were mentioned as the most obvious obstacle to Romani participation by every interviewee in the Czech Republic. Precarious financial situations mean that things like bus fare, sports clothing, equipment, and coaching or class fees are completely out of reach for many Romani families from marginalised communities.

Money is not just an obstacle to participating in sport for those living in spatial segregation. Data from the Fundamental Rights Agency published in 2022 found that 77% of all Roma in the Czech Republic are at risk of poverty (an increase from 58% in 2016). Almost all Roma (92%) over the age of 65 were found to be at risk of poverty.⁴

Lack of access to water or sanitation in the home has an obvious effect on the ability to participate in sports activities. The European Commission’s first Roma Civil Monitor found in 2018 that in areas of the Czech Republic “where safe water supply and sanitation services were available to non-Roma households, Roma were often systemically discriminated against in their access to them.” However, inadequate access to water is once again not an issue confined to Romani households in segregated living areas. The Roma Civil

Monitor also found that “the problem in the Czech Republic was acute in the privately-owned residential hostels, where a high percentage of the tenants are Roma and it is common for an entire floor of tenants to share showers and toilets.” Unequal or a complete lack of access to water makes sport and physical activity participation all but impossible for Romani people.

The general imbalance in equality when it comes to issues of sex and gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and age are equally present when it comes to the marginalisation and discrimination of Romani people. The deficit of rights is felt greater by Romani women and girls, who are usually disproportionately affected by issues of discrimination and racialised poverty. Notably in access to education, healthcare, and social services they face additional direct discrimination on account of the intersection between their ethnicity and their gender.

School segregation

For most children, school is the primary contact they have with sport and physical activity. For Romani children in education in the Czech Republic, this situation is complicated and hindered by the existence of widespread educational segregation.

In 2023, ECRI reiterated its previous 2020 recommendation to the Czech Republic to “ensure that all forms of de-facto segregation affecting Roma children in schools are ended.” Noting the government’s “Strategy of Educational Policy 2030+” and “National Recovery Plan” which aim to provide financial support to selected schools, ECRI surmised that despite these initiatives “no tangible results of the planned activities have so far been reported by the authorities. On the contrary, according to the government’s own information, tendencies towards segregation persist and there are, for example, still at least 77 schools in which Roma children make up the majority of pupils although only in a small number of

³ Interview 4: Social worker from Rotava, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022) “Roma in 10 European Countries: Main Results”, Roma Survey 2021 – Main results, Figure 4: At Risk of Poverty Rate (%), Page 25, Available: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf

these cases can such a concentration be explained by the percentage of Roma pupils living in the relevant catchment area.”⁵ Policy level attempts to desegregate education in the Czech Republic have all failed to make a difference on the ground. Political will, outside of such strategies, is wholly absent. As recently as March 2023, a Czech Senator proposed the segregation of Romani children as a “*totally rational step*” in a speech to the Senate in support of maintaining school segregation.⁶

An interviewed social worker from Kladno who supports marginalised Romani families described how children from the town all attend two segregated primary schools. Because of the poor standard of education that they receive there, Romani children often fail in the first stage of primary school. Therefore, when they finish, they have only attained an 8th grade education and the ‘only’ possible way they can continue is to attend a secondary school for children with mental and physical disabilities (a common form of education discrimination in the Czech Republic). The interviewee described how when another social worker attempted to arrange for a Romani child to finish primary school with the ninth grade, a complaint was filed against the social service by the director of the secondary school.

Children segregated in schools which offer them neither an academic future, nor realistic chances of employment later in life, have very little focus on sports participation in class or an extra-curricular activity. In contrast, the social worker from Kladno described how a small number of Romani boys were accepted into a sports elementary school and because of that were “*able to think about themselves completely differently. They had more self-confidence, self-assurance, and self-acceptance.*”

The social worker pointed to the “*development of communication and social skills, feeling a part of something, development of emotional skills, self-regulation, increased frustration tolerance*” as tangible benefits to Romani children if they are given the opportunity to participate in organised sport.⁷

Discrimination in access to facilities and provision of services

While lack of participation in sport because of segregation and racialised poverty may be described as a form indirect discrimination against Roma, the interviews brought up plenty of instances of direct discrimination against Roma. Schools, sports clubs, and municipal authorities can all directly discriminate against Roma with the deliberate aim of preventing them from engaging with sport and physical activity.

In Kladno, an interviewee described how Romani children from socially disadvantaged environments are discriminated against by football clubs who do not want to accept Romani children. In contrast, children who are refugees from Ukraine were preferentially accepted while those with a Romani background were outright rejected.⁸

In Rotava, a person who organises weekly sports activities for Roma described the lengths to which the local administration would go to deny Roma access to facilities.⁹ The interviewee describes how initially they accommodated the programme by renting the group a space at the school. Later the rent was raised in an attempt to discourage them, before refusing to rent to them altogether citing “disorder” on the part of the children. The group has been forced to play in the nearby town of Kraslice instead. The interviewed social worker describes how the refusal in not only

5 European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2022) “ECRI Conclusions on the Implementation of the Recommendations in Respect of the Czech Republic”, Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-the-recommendation-in-respect/1680aa6865>

6 Romea.cz (2023) “Czech senator proposes segregating Romani children in the schools, Commissioner for Romani Affairs objects to such apartheid and open racism”, 31 March 2023, Available: <https://romea.cz/en/czech-republic/czech-senator-proposes-segregating-romani-children-in-the-schools-commissioner-for-romani-affairs-objects-to-such-apartheid-and-open-racism>

7 Interview 5: Social worker from Kladno, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

8 Interview 5: Social worker from Kladno, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

9 Interview 4: Social worker from Rotava, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

because they are Romani, but because of the opinion from those at the school and in the town in general that *“these are activities for children who do not deserve it”*. The

unwillingness to work with Romani children (who are seen as problematic and disruptive) extends to every interaction with local authorities:

“We had agreement with the primary school in Rotava for the rent of the pitch, but the school director did not like that we organise activities for children who in her opinion didn’t deserve it. For her those children don’t deserve anything and they criticised us for organising several trips to the mountains or further non-formal educational activities. She said that we had to bring children who deserve it and they she will even recommend some children. But they did not want to understand that we primarily wanted to work with those children exactly to have a positive influence and change in their lives... In the sports halls we cannot go, in the school gym we cannot go. Everywhere we have a ban. In their eyes those children don’t deserve it, because they don’t fulfil the school attendance, they don’t have good grades, sometimes they have punishments from teachers. I understand this not good, but if we break their determination and we only tell them they are worth nothing then we are only making it worse.”

The problem comes from the top, as the mayor of the town is known for his statements against the Romani community and is engaged with attempts at evictions of Romani families and non-renewal of rental contracts to remove them from public housing. When free school lunches were requested at the local school (which would have greatly benefited marginalised Romani children), the mayor refused. The town refused to arrange spaces for the sports activities and ceased cooperation with the NGOs attempting to facilitate such activities. The only sport activities in the area are provided by social services or private associations. There is no access to any other sports activities and the children have no access to playgrounds or gymnasiums.

There is reportedly interest to play association football, but Roma are not able to join the team in Rotava as the mayor is also involved in football. Because of this

it is not even possible to organise a friendly match in the town and Romani children have to travel to nearby towns and villages to sign up if they want to try out for 11-a-side association football clubs.

In contrast, coaches interviewed from a football club which is based around a Romani community in Moravský Beroun described how access to football has had positive knock-on effects for the children. The club is involved in their children’s school education, they ask about grades, provide tutoring, and even on occasion help with financial difficulties experienced by players’ families. In Moravský Beroun, the club receives positive feedback from the city authorities and school because of their hands-on approach to inclusion through sport. The municipal authorities work with the football club and provide access to facilities.¹⁰

10 Interview 6: Two football coaches and community workers from Moravský Beroun, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

A representative of the South Moravian Region described the prejudice Roma face in every interaction in society as the principal barrier to inclusion and

access to sports. The representative is a public official working in the regional office of the South Moravian Region in contact with Romani communities, he said:

“There has been a long-standing antigypsyism here [in the Czech Republic]. I still think that when a Roma comes to someone asking for a job, the person already approaches them with prejudices. The same goes for housing, and it might be the case with sports too.”¹¹

Racist abuse in sport

Fear of racial abuse from non-Roma taking part in sporting activities was cited as a prime barrier for Romani and Traveller people in accessing sport in interviews throughout the project. In the Czech Republic, attitudes towards the Romani population are among the worst recorded in the European Union. According to the 2019 EU Barometer results,¹² 73% of Czech respondents had no friends or acquaintances who were Romani, and 56% indicated they would be totally uncomfortable with their child being in a romantic relationship with a Romani person. A 2021 poll of 2000 Czechs aged 15 – 30 found that 86% of respondents found coexistence with Roma in the country as problematic (although it found significantly more progressive views amongst the youngest respondents).¹³

Interviewees point to a lack of literature in schools that portrays Roma in a positive light, as well as intergenerational transmission of prejudice from parents to children, resulting in a hostile environment for Romani children who might participate in sporting activities with non-Romani children. In access schemes where social associations or NGOs have brought together Roma and non-Roma to participate in sport together, interviewees reported overwhelmingly positive relations. The social worker from Rotava reported that after being unable to operate successfully in the town due to discrimination from municipal authorities, the sports activities were carried on in nearby Kraslice where Roma and non-Roma could build friendships.

“It’s one of the most natural things, when they start playing football together and friendships are being built through it. They start writing each other on social media, they start visiting each other even outside the football matches between different towns. And nobody is speculating if one is Roma or not, the friendship is really natural between them, thanks to the fact that they share the same values and the same aims. They see each other regularly. If we would have more support from the town, we could realise much more towards the social cohesion of those youngsters.”

¹¹ Interview 8: 8. Public Official working for the South Moravian Region, Czech Republic, 27 October 2023

¹² European Commission (2019) “Special Barometer 493: Discrimination in the European Union”, Available: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

¹³ Hate Free (2021) “Research on the attitudes of young Czechs towards human rights and the rights of endangered minorities”, Available (in Czech): <https://www.hatefree.cz/clanky/vyzkum-postoji-mladych-cechu-k-lidskym-pravum-a-pravum-ohrozenych-mensin-2>

At a professional level, racist abuse towards Roma in football in the Czech Republic is completely normalised. There are virtually no professional players who self-identify as Romani in the Czech Republic. In 2014 the amateur team “Roma Děčín” infamously won their opening five games of the season because other teams preferred to take a 3-0 forfeit loss and a fine of €70 than play against the Roma-majority team.¹⁴ Chants of “Cikáni! Cikáni!” (Gypsies! Gypsies!) can be regularly heard at domestic and European football fixtures.¹⁵ In 2021 a group of football ultras, allegedly supporters of Slavia Prague, attacked a group of Roma (including children) in Sokolov.¹⁶ Amidst this climate of hate, it is unsurprising that Romani football players are underrepresented, and many choose not to reveal their ethnic identity.

Gender-specific barriers to participation in sport and physical activity

The interviews in the Czech Republic revealed huge issues in overcoming gendered access to sports. A social worker from Kladno described a situation of “double discrimination for girls, who are discriminated not only by belonging to a national minority but also for their gender.”¹⁷ Across the board, interviewees described very little interest from Romani girls in participation. However, there was little in evidence of sports schemes directed specifically towards encouraging Romani girls’ participation. A gender-blind approach to sports in the hope that ‘if we build it, they will come’ seems unlikely to attract many Romani girls from marginalised backgrounds.

In Rotava and Kraslice, the organiser of sports activities for Romani children admitted that the scheme caters mainly to boys and that while two other colleagues work with girls it was unclear if this was related to

sports participation or not. Like other interviewees, the emphasis was placed on Romani culture as a reason for lack of participation for Romani girls:

“Girls go to watch the boys; they don’t play football...It may be related to cultural stigma. It is very unusual for Roma for a girl to play football. At the turn of puberty, girls leave because they are shamed to play. For the boys, sports is much more natural, there is a big difference between [Romani] boys and girls. At the beginning of the project girls also went to the gym but it didn’t last long. During adolescence they give up sports...they drop out of the programme around the age of 14 when they are no longer considered children. Around 16 or 17-years-old, they get pregnant, and the stage of motherhood begins for them.”¹⁸

A social worker from Moravský Beroun described how their club (which offers football, but also ‘floorball’ hockey and table tennis) had one Romani girl who went on to play for Slavia Prague, but generally the girls “are mostly focussed on dancing.” The parents were described as not particularly caring either way if it was their daughter or son who participated in sports, as in general they were not supportive of participation in sport activities.¹⁹

14 The Independent (2014) “Roma club in Czech Republic enjoys its best season ever – because their opponents won’t play them”, 13 November 2014, Available: <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/roma-club-in-czech-republic-enjoys-its-best-season-ever-because-their-opponents-won-t-play-them-9858099.html>

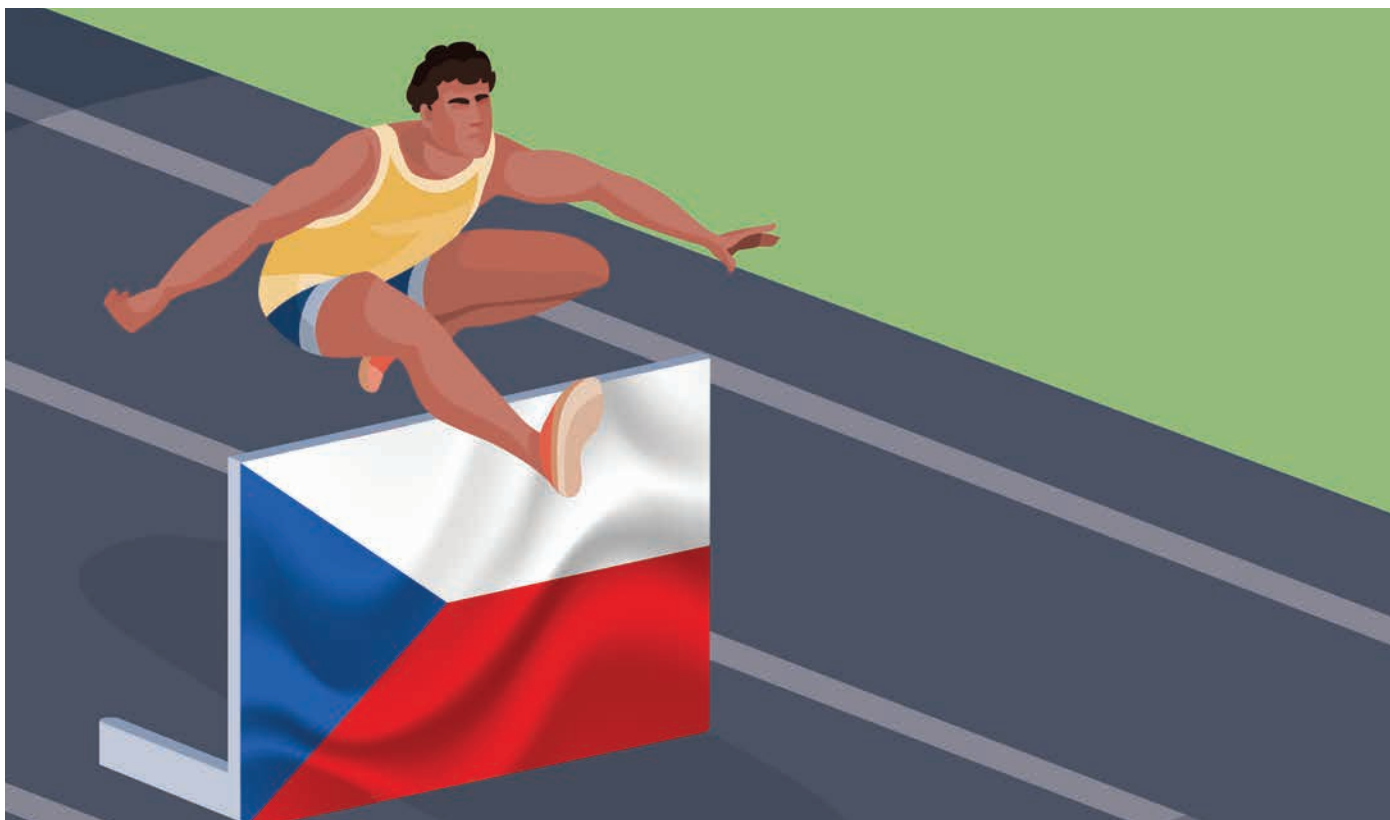
15 Sport.cz (2022) “Gypsies, gypsies! Slavia fans racially insulted domestic spectators, complains a Romanian journalist”, 14 October 2022, Available (in Czech): <https://www.sport.cz/clanek/fotbal-evropska-konferencni-liga-cikani-cikani-fanousci-slavie-rasisticky-urazeli-domaci-divaky-stezuje-si-rumunsky-novinar-3690684>

16 Romea.cz (2021) “Several dozen Romani people protest in Sokolov, Czech Republic over the attack by football hooligans on local Roma”, 25 July 2021, Available: <https://romea.cz/en/czech-republic/several-dozen-romani-people-protest-in-sokolov-czech-republic-over-the-attack-by-football-hooligans-on-local-roma>

17 Interview 5: Social worker from Kladno, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

18 Interview 4: Social worker from Rotava, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

19 Interview 6: Two football coaches and community workers from Moravský Beroun, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023



The public official for the South Moravian Region described how he saw traditional values in Romani families as a barrier to participation for Romani women and girls:

“I think it’s more of a boys’ thing in Roma families. I don’t know, I haven’t encountered many girls doing sports with Roma, to be honest. And I think it comes from those families, let’s say, the more traditional Roma families. I might be wrong, but I don’t recall seeing Roma girls, for example, playing football.”²⁰



Interviewees’ assumptions about female participation in sport amongst Romani communities tended to focus overly on culturally deterministic assumptions about the communities. Culture, rather than the very real barriers brought about by the effects of exclusion and segregation (which are disproportionately experienced

by women and girls), were erroneously seen as the prime obstacle to sport participation. There seemed to be no specific programmes to open access to Romani girls reported, either through direct outreach or the offer of a wider variety of sport and physical activity.

²⁰ Interview 8: 8. Public Official working for the South Moravian Region, Czech Republic, 27 October 2023



IRELAND:

BARRIERS TO TRAVELLER SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Approximately 37,500 Irish Travellers and Roma live in Ireland,¹ including up to 5,000 Roma,² principally from Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic. Irish Travellers are an indigenous community who traditionally have a semi-nomadic culture that has over recent decades been eroded by persecution, assimilatory practices, and state policies. Many Travellers still live in mobile homes or caravans on temporary or permanent halting sites, with a smaller number still living nomadically on road-side encampments (despite various legislation designed to criminalise this lifestyle). Irish Travellers were formally recognised by the Irish Government as an indigenous ethnic minority group in March 2017 (a significant gesture but one which has no significant legal effect).³

Inadequate accommodation & racialised poverty

Despite existing legalisation in place, there is a substantial shortage of transient sites (temporary halting sites which would allow Travellers to follow their nomadic culture) across the country. Of the 1,000 transient bays identified as needed in a 1995 Task Force Report, only 54 are in existence, with not all functioning as usable transient sites.⁴

The main objectives of Ireland's National Travellers and Roma Integration Strategy (NTRIS) concern the provision of adequate, culturally appropriate,

accommodation for Irish Travellers (there is no mention of the accommodation needs of Roma in the document). Whilst the Strategy contains actions on accommodation which promise effective change if implemented, as well as linked provision of funding, the reality since the adoption and conclusion of the NTRIS has been one of little to no improvement in this regard. ECRI notes in its most recent monitoring in Ireland that "little tangible progress has been made so far and these groups continue to be the most marginalised communities in Ireland."⁵

¹ Government of Ireland (2011) "Ireland's National Traveller / Roma Integration Strategy", Available: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2017-06/ireland_national_strategy_roma_inclusion_en.pdf

² Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre (2018) "Roma in Ireland", Available: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/project/national-roma-needs-assessment/>

³ Haynes, A., Joyce, S., & Schweppe, J. (2021) "The Significance of the Declaration of Ethnic Minority Status for Irish Travellers", *Nationalities Papers*, 49(2), 270-288. doi:10.1017/nps.2020.28, Available: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/nationalities-papers/article/abs/significance-of-the-declaration-of-ethnic-minority-status-for-irish-travellers/43818064987B6E49B2604DB511FCBE97>

⁴ National Traveller MABS (2019) "Ireland in Breach in Practice and in Legislation of Traveller's Housing, Accommodation and Eviction Rights", Available at: <https://www.ntmabs.org/mobile/news/172-ireland-in-breach-in-practice-and-in-legislation-of-traveller-s-housing-accommodation-and-eviction-rights>

⁵ European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2019) "ECRI Report on Ireland (fifth monitoring cycle)", Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-ireland/168094c575>

The strategy fails to account for the bloody-mindedness and stubborn racism of some local authorities who despite funding being available, refuse to draw it down to pay for Traveller accommodation. ECRI notes that the majority of local councils have failed to provide adequate accommodation for Travellers. Worse, in 2017 only seven local councils drew down the entire amount they were allocated for Traveller accommodation. Only 4.8 million euros was drawn down from an overall budget of 9 million euros that year, with nine local councils not investing a single euro on Traveller accommodation (nearly a third of all local authorities). This means that at a local level, authorities would rather return 4.1 million euros unspent than spend it on Travellers. An Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report found that a third of such funds were returned unspent between 2008 and 2018 across the country.⁶ Local authorities point to prejudice and opposition from local settled residents against the construction or improvement of new halting sites for Travellers. However, as ECRI points out, a lack of will at local level and a lack of sanctions for under-delivery means local authorities have no urgency to remedy the situation.

The chronic accommodation deficit and oftentimes dangerous living conditions Travellers are forced to endure is a huge barrier to participating in sport and physical activity. An ECRI delegation visiting Saint Mary's Traveller site in north Dublin expressed alarm at the "deplorable conditions in which Travellers were living." They noted that the site had only a single water connection point and one toilet for fourteen families which included more than 40 young children. The site

had no waste collection services and ECRI described the living environment as "insalubrious and hazardous."⁷ Inadequate facilities, particularly water, on halting sites can be a huge barrier for children participating in sports and activities. A 1.2-acre halting site at Moneen Road, Castlebar in County Mayo is the home to a five household Traveller family who have been living without running water or a secure electricity supply for more than 20 years. The Maughan extended family, which includes 17 children, moved to the site after a young child survived being hit by a passing truck on a nearby main road. The family survive using a generator which is run for a few hours a day, portable stoves, and two portable toilets (one paid for by the local council, the other rented for €50 a week by the family). County Mayo was listed as one of ten local authorities which did not draw down any of the funding allocated for Traveller accommodation in 2019.⁸

Exchange House Ireland note that for many Travellers living on halting sites, access to the physical space to even engage in exercise at home is severely limited. This became especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic as limited space on sites, and many sites being located on a main road, meant that even going for a jog could be a dangerous activity. Lack of public transport to many halting sites often limits participation in organised sport for Travellers. In most of the interviews, financial constraints were mentioned as a potential barrier to participation by Travellers themselves and representatives of sporting bodies. Access and location of sites far from organised sport facilities was also noted as a barrier encountered.

"A big barrier stopping young travellers going into sport is that they have to work, they have to make money to survive, and I think it's a big commitment going into sport and not being supported financially." ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

6 Irish Independent (2021) "Councils criticised as €58m for Traveller accommodation goes unspent for a decade", 14 July 2021, Available: <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/councils-criticised-as-58m-for-traveller-accommodation-goes-unspent-for-a-decade/40650757.html>

7 European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2019) "ECRI Report on Ireland (fifth monitoring cycle)", Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-ireland/168094c575>

8 The Irish Times (2020) "More than €4m in Traveller housing funding left unspent", 18 May 2020, Available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/more-than-4m-in-traveller-housing-funding-left-unspent-1.4256149>

9 Interview 9: Traveller man in Finglas, Dublin, 5 July 2023

Forced evictions of Travellers represent a complete disregard for any attempt at so-called “integration” practices by public authorities. A 2017 national survey on Travellers found that 1 in 3 Travellers had been forced to move from their home in their lives. The impact of a forced eviction on school, employment, mental and physical health, and societal exclusion cannot be overstated. In terms of access to sport and physical activity, forced evictions likely mean a complete break in participation of any kind of sport activity for an indefinite period. The survey also showed that fewer Travellers are travelling in general compared to a previous survey in 2000. Only 1 in 10 respondents said that they still travel, compared with 1 in 3 in 2000.¹⁰

The depth of structural racism in Traveller accommodation and access to basic infrastructure was brought to the fore in the Carrickmines catastrophe, which claimed 10 young lives on a poorly maintained temporary halting site in 2016. In the wake of the

fire, settled residents organised protests to prevent accommodating the survivors. Traveller survivors of the fire were correspondingly moved to a site which was described by the New York Times as “an isolated parking lot adjacent to a decommissioned dump - a site whose single apparent advantage was having nobody living close enough to object.”¹¹ Rather than signal a new dawn of inclusive policy from local authorities, the national fire safety audit in Traveller accommodation which was rolled out ostensibly to protect lives and promised no evictions, in fact resulted in a number of evictions which left Traveller families homeless.¹²

Fear of racial abuse from non-Travellers

The first barrier to participation in sport given by Travellers themselves in interview was invariably the fear of prejudice from non-Travellers. All Travellers interviewed or surveyed described some form of discriminatory treatment (normally in the form of ethnic slurs) during their participation in organised sport in the past.

“I’ve played football, and you’ll hear the words ‘tramp’, ‘knacker’, all the derogatory words that’s associated with your ethnicity, and I’ve heard it directed at me and other Traveller players... It stays with you, you’re always conscious of it there...”¹³

Their fears are borne out by survey data from the Irish Government, which in June 2023 found that only 53% of Irish respondents would feel comfortable living next door to Travellers or Roma (compared to 93% for white Irish), and only 43% reported feeling comfortable with the idea of their child being in a relationship with a

Traveller (compared to 95% for a white Irish person).¹⁴ Traveller interviewees describe the use of ethnic slurs as common in sport, as well as discrimination from coaches who refuse to pick players because of their ethnicity and use racist language in front of other team members.

10 Behaviour and Attitudes, ‘Traveller Community National Survey.’ Dublin: CFI, 2017

11 Bernard Rorke, In the shadow of Carrickmines, *ERRC News*, 23 May 2016. Available at: <http://www.errc.org/news/in-the-shadow-of-carrickmines-irish-government-violates-traveller-housing-and-accommodation-rights>

12 Bernard Rorke, Belated first steps: Irish Government Finally Moves on Ethnic Recognition of Travellers, *ERRC News*, 28 November 2016. Available at: <http://www.errc.org/news/belated-first-steps-irish-government-finally-moves-on-ethnic-recognition-of-travellers>

13 Interview 9: Traveller man in Finglas, Dublin, 5 July 2023

14 Government of Ireland (2023) “New survey examines people’s attitudes to diversity in Ireland”, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/ba395-new-survey-examines-people-in-irelands-attitudes-to-diversity/#>

“I had coaches from 10-years-old up to about 17, and they were very, very good, but then I got a fella then that – he didn’t like Travellers. This fella didn’t like Travellers and the reason why I knew this was because any time that he had a Traveller on his team in the years before and the years after, he would always have the one issue with him... So, he didn’t want you getting involved and it got to the stage where he wasn’t starting you as much, he didn’t want to play you, no communication, he just didn’t want you around the team. If you were better than the other lads, he still wouldn’t play you because you’re a Traveller.”¹⁵

Another Traveller man, who started a Traveller football team and entered the local county league, described the impossibility of attracting funding from sponsors when they found out it was for a Traveller only football team:

“The barrier I found with the club in particular was we depended very much locally on Traveller support for funding for example. I noticed when you go for advertising the Traveller team to funders, non-Travellers were kind of like – ‘no’ – and to me, it wasn’t that they didn’t want to do it, or it wasn’t in their remit, it was just because of the Traveller association. I’ve seen that finance being a barrier. Now, was it racism or discrimination? You can never say it is, but you feel it was. You feel it’s – ‘I’m not having anything to do with a Traveller soccer team.’”



The effect of discrimination in sports on Travellers’ mental health was frequently brought up by interviewees, as well as the exacerbating effect of social media. While representatives of sporting bodies in Ireland pointed to the positive impact Traveller role models could have on increasing participation of Traveller communities in sports, interviewees described how young travellers are understandably reluctant to be promoted publicly considering the level of racist vitriol directed at Travellers online and in the news media.

“Would you want to put yourself out there when you know there’s a high possibility that you’re going to be called names because you’re a Traveller, you’re going to have all these negative stereotypes about your community? You wouldn’t want that...I’ve seen Travellers involved in different sports and when you ask them ‘can we promote them through the social media?’ they’re like – ‘no’ – because the fear is that of the comment section, it’s that one thing all the time.”



¹⁵ Interview 10: Traveller man in Dublin, 28 August 2023

Social media in general was described as a major anxiety for Travellers concerning hate speech within a sports environment. It was seen by interviewees as a compounding factor to racism in sports because of the invasive nature of online hate and the devastating effects it can have on mental health of young Travellers. A Traveller man working at Exchange House Ireland said:

“I think compared with the younger generation now, we would have experienced stuff on the football pitch or whatever sports your involved in, and we could go home and it wouldn’t necessarily follow us home even though we’d be thinking about it. But young people now with their devices and their smartphones and their tablets and stuff, it can follow them back to their own house. And people can remain anonymous online and call you all sorts of names and everything and it can really affect the young people. They can feel trapped and there’s no escape from it.”¹⁶



Travellers also described the anxiety they experience worrying about being the target of anti-Traveller persecution from others when engaging in sport (even if it doesn’t happen) as being a mental health barrier in itself.

“Because you’re a Traveller, and when you’d be going out to play soccer – or any sports, going to do refereeing or anything like that – you’re always conscious of it. You’re always thinking about it, that it’ll happen [racist abuse]. You’re worrying about it before it even happens. It’s always there and that is the worry, that you’ll experience it.”¹⁷

One Traveller interviewee described how the cumulation of biases, discrimination, and risk of hate speech means that many Travellers are driven away from sports. Some interviewees said that while sport is a break from the pressures of daily life for most people; this is not the case for Travellers, who must face the abuse which they normally experience in Irish society echoed back at them on the sports field.

“I think it goes back a long way historically. My father and mother for example, their experience in school, like the white line across the school yard and segregation. So historically it’s just been the treatment of travellers – one would be forgiven for thinking ‘do you know what, I’m not going to even open my mouth here’ [and self-identify] because of the historic treatment...I’ve seen it with young Travellers. You go into a shop and you’re afraid of being followed around [by security], you go for a job interview and if they see your address and it’s a well-known Traveller halting site, your fear is they won’t give you the job...[in sport] the fear is they’ll be mistreated, probably not picked for the team – all these things going through their mind.”

“So, it’s happening in everyday life, it’s happening when they go to the shops, it’s happening in their daily lives, so when they’re going into sports trying to get maybe an escape from that, the reason they might hide their identity is because they don’t want to experience it there as well.”

¹⁶ Interview 9: Traveller interviewer from Exchange House Ireland in Finglas, Dublin, 5 July 2023

¹⁷ Interview 9: Traveller man in Finglas, Dublin, 5 July 2023

THE BOXING EXCEPTION

Boxing is the one sport where Travellers reported no discrimination, where there is reportedly a good level of participation amongst the community, and a higher number of positive role models.

A Traveller man from Leinster described how “apart from boxing, Travellers are not wanted in sports such as GAA, and big soccer clubs in towns.” An interviewee from the Athlete’s Commission at the Olympic Federation of Ireland singled out boxing as the sole sport with a good level of Traveller participation and which positive stories, or “heroes”, can be promoted. A Sport Ireland representative also described boxing as the “most inclusive sport” with “soccer probably second.”



Traveller culture: the alleged barrier to sports participation

Representatives from sporting bodies in Ireland were often over-preoccupied with the role ‘Traveller culture’ plays in preventing Traveller communities from participating in sports. While the words ‘prejudice’ and ‘stigma’ were mentioned by the majority of interviewees from sporting bodies (‘discrimination’ was rarely used), the notion of “*cultural problems*”, as one interviewee called it, loomed large as a perceived barrier to Traveller participation.

There appeared to be an across-the-board ignorance about the sheer degree of discrimination and racism faced by Travellers in every-day life in Ireland and how this might translate into sport participation. The use of phrases like “*maybe some unconscious biases*” to describe discrimination in access to sport is at best uninformed and at worst insulting, considering the level of exclusion Travellers face in Ireland.

While Traveller interviewees and sporting body interviewees agreed on the positive impact of Traveller sporting role models, the reasons each gave for the

dearth of individuals willing to be promoted as such were completely different to each other. Travellers pointed to the barrage of hate speech and death threats they receive as a barrier to being held up as a role model in sport, while representatives of sporting bodies described the reluctance being down to Travellers’ discomfort in “*stepping outside of their communities*.”

While levels of pro-active work to engage Travellers in sport varied between sports, a lack of good information on levels of participation was commonly mentioned across all sporting associations. A ‘colour-blind’ approach to minority inclusion seemed prevalent in most sports but was identified by some interviewees as not always being particularly useful. The Sport Ireland representative highlighted that in certain cases, targeted affirmative actions to include Traveller communities are needed at a local level. Interviewees from most sports associations indicated that not enough is being done at club level to ensure Traveller participation. Many mentioned that clubs do little to proactively include Travellers and opt for a ‘the door is open if they want to come approach’ which does little to improve participation amongst Traveller communities.

Gender-specific barriers to participation in sport and physical activity

The lack of female Traveller interviewees is telling as to the level of participation in sport amongst the community. It should be noted however that the general reluctance for Travellers to expose themselves to potential hate speech and abuse is likely to be increased for Traveller women and girls, who experience additional, unique prejudices on account of both their ethnicity and gender.

The representative of Sport Ireland indicated that a focus of current programmes in development, using European Social Funding, will be aimed at intersectionality and sports participation. The interviewee indicated the organisation's interest in ensuring a specific focus on Travellers and Traveller women and girls. The use of championing role models and targeted local partnerships to facilitate better participation within Traveller communities for women and girls was also highlighted.

A Diversity and Inclusion Officer at the Gaelic Athletic Association argued the barriers to female Traveller participation were largely because of gender roles within the community; the idea that women and girls who participate in sports are stepping outside of traditions, which in practice means stepping outside of the community.

There is a distinct lack of information or studies into the level or participation of Traveller women and girls in sport and activity. A study carried out in 2001 by the Department of Health in Galway City¹⁸ did reveal data that Traveller women, while seemingly statistically invisible in organised sport, are engaged much more frequently in physical exercise than Traveller men. The study found that “considerably more females spend over five hours per day on activities than males. Females worked at a higher intensity than males and also scored a higher average on the activity index than males.” The study lists the main reasons for not participating in sport or physical activity: “discrimination, not enough time, not fit or healthy enough and not interested or motivated.” Traveller women in this study did not explicitly mention their gender identity or Traveller culture as a barrier to participating in sport, the main barrier in their own perception was once again the risk of discrimination. The only other specific study on

Traveller women participating in sport was from an undergraduate at the Waterford Institute of Technology in 2017. The study used focus groups of Traveller women who, according to the author, mostly “agreed if they had an interest in certain sports, access would not be an issue.” The only exception was boxing, which is described as an “important sport for Travellers, yet female Travellers are discouraged from participating due to the nature of the sport.”¹⁹

While cultural barriers to female Traveller participation in sport certainly exist, many of these are not specific to Irish Travellers but common across many excluded minority groups. Traditional gender roles which place women in the home and responsible for domestic duties are hardly unique to Irish Traveller communities. The existence of such norms may largely be attributed to the societal exclusion and segregation of Travellers, rather than being an intrinsic component of Traveller culture.

¹⁸ Bunyan, K (2001) “Physical activity and lifestyle survey of the Traveller community in Galway city”, The Department of Public Health, Western Health Board, Available: <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/43794/4307.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹⁹ Kean, L. (2017) “A Study on the Inclusion of the Irish Travelling Community in Sports Clubs in Waterford City”, *Dissertation* Waterford Institute of Technology, Department of Health, Sport and Exercise Sciences, April 2017, Available: <https://library.wit.ie/theses/RMThesis%20440.pdf>



ITALY:

BARRIERS TO ROMANI SPORTS PARTICIPATION

There are no accurate figures on the current number of Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti in Italy. According to unofficial estimates they are approximately 120,000 - 180,000,¹ including both Italian citizens and others. There are broadly three main groups of Romani people in Italy:

- Roma & Sinti (Romani peoples who arrived in Italy sometime in the 15th century).
- Balkan Roma (who arrived initially as refugees from Balkan countries following the wars in the 1990s).
- Central & Eastern European Roma (often from post-2004 member states such as Romania or Bulgaria).

There also exists a smaller ethnic group in the South of Italy who are known as Caminanti (meaning ‘walkers’). They are a traditionally semi-nomadic group principally centred around Sicily with smaller communities in Campania, Lombardy, and Lazio (who habitually travel to central and northern regions for periods of the year). While ethnically unrelated to Romani peoples, they are included in the first national inclusion strategy (2012 – 2020) to protect them from discrimination.²

The human rights situation and issues preventing participation in sport vary between each of these

groups, but this report will largely focus on Roma who have migrated to Italy from elsewhere in Europe. These Roma are more likely to live in segregated settings, are unable to hide their ethnic identity, and are correspondingly more affected by barriers preventing access to sport.

Nomad Camps, Forced Evictions, and Racialised Poverty

Italy’s practice of placing Romani peoples in segregated housing began around the 1960s but was further solidified by the policies of the 2008 ‘nomad emergency’ (when the government issued a state of emergency and implemented draconian, anti-Roma policies).³ The legacy of this emergency decree never really went away for Roma. The formalised creation of government-run, ethnically segregated ‘nomad camps’ may be a thing of the past, but their legacy lives on. Italy’s promises to ‘overcome the system of camps’ since 2012 have resulted in local authorities

¹ Minority Rights Group International (2023) “Minorities and indigenous peoples in Italy: Roma”, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Available: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-25/>

² Strati, Filippo (2021) “Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma”, European Commission, Available: <https://www.srseuropa.eu/publications/2011-%20Roma-IT.pdf>

³ Renata Goldirova (2008) “Italy extends state of emergency over immigration”, EU Observer, 28 July 2008, Available: <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/26551>

abandoning responsibility for maintaining their camps, with very few actually being shut down. The few formal camps that have been closed have come at the cost of hundreds and thousands of people made homeless by mass forced evictions. In 2021 there were still at least 109 segregated camps and shelters (housing approximately 11,300 people) operated by local authorities in Italy, according to estimates by the Italian NGO Associazione 21 Luglio. A further 6,500 Roma are estimated to live in ‘informal camps’,

many because of previous evictions of local-authority-run ‘nomad camps.’⁴ Between 2017 and 2021, the ERRC has documented at least 187 evictions of Romani communities in Italy affecting more than 3000 people.⁵

A Romani woman was interviewed whose family arrived in Italy during the early 1990s. She described the system by which the nomad camps operated, and how they continue to segregate Roma to this day:

“Before the war we were fine, life was very normal, my mother was a housewife and seamstress, my father a farmer. We had a house, land to farm. Because of the war we escaped. Arriving in Italy for us and my parents was traumatic...We arrived in Italy and found ourselves in the camp system. It was an imposition to find ourselves in the camp, not a choice. If you said you were Roma, once you arrived, you went to the camp. Italy was forced to close the camps. It is apartheid. It is a bad experience and I have lived it. However, after the closure there has to be a concrete housing solution. With evictions you often destroy what little a family builds up.”⁶



4 Associazione 21 Luglio (2021) “Exclusion in the time of Covid”, Available (in Italian): <https://www.21luglio.org/cs-lesclusione-nel-tempo-del-covid/>

5 European Roma Rights Centre (2021) Italy has evicted more than 3000 Roma since 2017”, Press Release, 24 May 2021, Available: <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/italy-has-evicted-more-than-three-thousand-roma-since-2017>

6 Interview 18: Romani woman from Turin, 19 April 2023

Interviewees highlighted spatial segregation and the effects thereof as the main barriers to Romani people participating in sport. Conditions in the camps are often characterised by limited access to basic infrastructure (such as a regular electricity supply) and public services (such as waste collection). ECRI's most recent monitoring report on Italy states that "most Roma, especially in the large cities, continue to live in conditions of acute marginalisation and discrimination, in terms of access to housing and other social rights."⁷ In its 2019 Conclusions on Italy, ECRI made no indication that improvements had been made in this

regard.⁸ While the second Conte cabinet made promises in 2019 to the European Commission on implementing measures to ameliorate the marginalisation of Romani people, the situation of neglecting the ever-more-dilapidated camps and weekly evictions of Roma from their living spaces continues.

Interviewees mentioned a lack of engagement by the state on meaningful social integration policies which might alleviate the socio-economic pressures faced by Roma living in segregated settings. The coach of a women's football team in Padua told an interviewer:

"There are higher difficulties with this community. It is a more marginalised and discriminated community. I think of the camps that are close to the bypass roads and far from the city centre, of services."

The geographical segregation of many Romani camps was highlighted by several interviewees as a major barrier to sport participation. A minimum level of basic public service access, especially public transport, is necessary to even allow the possibility of access to organised sport or physical activity for marginalised communities.

Poor access to education

Education was highlighted as the prime access point for sport participation during interviews with the European Commission, but with access to education for Roma in Italy remaining shockingly poor, this constitutes a major obstacle to accessing sport for Romani children. According to FRA data from 2021, only 26% of Roma aged 20 – 24 in Italy had attended school until at least upper secondary school. The majority of Romani children in Italy therefore drop out of school before completing a high school education. While school segregation is not so systemic

and widespread as in the Czech Republic, FRA data showed at least 7% of Romani children in education were attending classes where all if not most of the other students were Romani.⁹

A higher number of Romani girls drop out than Romani boys. According to FRA "the implications of school non-attendance are important for both girls and boys but affect girls disproportionately. If girls drop out of school, their life chances narrow dramatically."¹⁰ A human rights worker from Milan said that "*girls drop out of school early because the idea of family as the main perspective is also created in them.*" The link between gender and lack of education and the connection to segregation was highlighted by several interviewees.

For Romani communities living in spatial segregation, access to education is significantly hindered.

Interviewees described how educational inequalities mean that the opportunity to engage in school sport

7 European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2016) "ECRI Report on Italy (fifth monitoring cycle)", Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-italy/16808b5837>

8 European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (2019) "ECRI Conclusions on the Implementation of the Recommendations in Respect of Italy", Council of Europe, Available: <https://rm.coe.int/interim-follow-up-conclusions-on-italy-5th-monitoring-cycle-/168094ce16>

9 EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021) "Roma in 10 European Countries: Main Results", Roma Survey 2021, Available: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf

10 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) "Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States", Roma survey – Data in focus, Page 37, Available: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-roma-survey-dif-education-1_en.pdf



successes. Without addressing the fundamental inequalities brought about by segregation and the system of camps, access to education and particularly extra-curricular sport will continue to be poor.

Rather than inclusion schemes which appear to focus on changing behaviours of Romani communities, local successes can be achieved through intercultural exchange (through sport or otherwise). An example of genuine understanding and attempt to include Romani children in education was between teachers from the Via Pini Primary School in Milan and children who had been evicted from an informal camp at Via Rubattino.

On 19th November 2009, a Romani community of 400 people was evicted from their homes they had built at Via Rubattino in Milan. Police in riot gear accompanied by bulldozers arrived at dawn and destroyed the camp, leaving families sleeping on the streets and under bridges nearby. In the coming weeks and months, the local municipality pursued a relentless ‘zero tolerance policy’ against Roma and carried out dozens of evictions of families who had started to build a new home elsewhere. One young girl was reportedly evicted more than twenty times during this period. The response from their primary school, numerous activists, students, and decent citizens of the neighbourhood was to demonstrate against the evictions. Teachers protested with their classes in public piazzas against the policy affecting their Romani schoolmates, they went to the living places of Romani children to pick them up for school in the morning, and on the eve of yet another eviction published a public letter in support of the Romani children who only wanted to be able to attend school. It is included in its entirety below:



is also limited. The human rights activist from Milan said that *“school is a great space to create sports activities and hear proposals about sports. But some minors do not see the world of school as ‘theirs’ It can be tiring to go to school, families cannot keep up and promote school attendance, there is a lack of a bus to pick up minors and take them to school, there is a physical distance even to access it, and precariousness if you move.”*¹¹

A representative of the Municipality of Padua¹² described activities to counter unequal access to sports within education. The municipality has proposed afternoon meetings at school to promote sport through mixed classes engaged in different sports. These meetings are held within schools and are designed to use sport as a vehicle for making children from marginalised Romani backgrounds comfortable in the educational environment in an attempt to improve attendance and reduce drop-out rates. Such initiatives can only be successful of course if the initial barriers to physical participation are overcome. Actions to build facilities and engage in community outreach can only meet with limited, short lived, and often individual

¹¹ Interview 19: Human rights activist in Milan, 22 March 2023

¹² Interview 20: Representative of the Municipality of Padua, a social policy councillor, and three social workers, 19 April 2023

"Hello Marius, hello Cristina, Ana, hello to all of you children from the segregated camp. You won't read our greeting in the newspaper, because your parents don't know how to read and they don't buy the newspaper. It is precisely for this reason that they enrolled you in school and that they continued to send you even though their life is very difficult, because they dream of seeing you integrated into this society, because they dream of a future in which you are respected and can see your talents recognised, your ability and your dignity. They make you study because they dream that at least you may have a job, a house and the trust of others.

We know how difficult these months have been for you: the cold, very cold, the continuous evictions that forced you every time to lose everything and sleep in the open while waiting for your dads to rebuild a shack, knowing that the bulldozers from there 'Soon they would have destroyed it again along with everything you have. We wanted to keep your school bags at school so that you know that we are always waiting for you, and also because we didn't want the bulldozers that will raze your houses to the ground in a few days to make havoc of your work, full of enthusiasm and effort. We will be at school waiting for you, we will come to get you if you cannot come, we will not leave you alone, neither you nor your parents who we have learned to respect and appreciate.

Thank you for being our students, for teaching us how much tenacity there can be in wanting to study, thanks to your parents who always put you first and who trusted us. Your classmates will ask us about you, many will already know why it was not your mother who accompanied you but your teacher. What explanations can we give them? And which ones can we give to you, who share the rules, the affection, the justice, the solidarity with your classes: how will we explain the evictions to you? We don't know what we will explain to you, but we will certainly continue to teach you many, many things, as many things as we can, so that tomorrow you are able to defend yourselves from injustice, so that your children are treated like children, not like Roma children, guilty before they were even born.

We will teach you a thousand words, a hundred thousand words so that no one can ever try to destroy those like you who have no voice. Now we are your voice, together with many other teachers, professors, parents of your classmates, together with the volunteers who have been with you for years and many friends and inhabitants of our area. See you soon children, at school. Your teachers: Irene Gasparini, Flaviana Robbiati, Stefania Faggi, Ornella Salina, Maria Sciorio, Monica Faccioli".¹

¹ Vita Editorial Staff (2010) "Open letter from the teachers of Via Pini on the eve of a new eviction", Vita, 16 February 2010, Available (in Italian): <https://www.vita.it/le-maestre-agli-alunni-rom-la-vostra-voce-siamo-noi/>

Real inclusion could take place here because of changes in behaviours of those in the public education system who spent extra effort to ensure that vulnerable children could attend school. More than a decade after the evictions, almost all the former inhabitants of the camp live in proper housing, at least one person per family has a permanent job, and the children attend and finish school until at least high school level.¹³ Successes of this scale are virtually without equal anywhere in Italy.

Societal antigypsyism

The degree of anti-Romani sentiment in Italy is worthy of mention as a barrier in and of itself to Romani participation in sport (or any activity which might bring them into potentially dangerous situations with unsupervised members of the Italian public.)

The level of societal racism towards Romani people was described by one interviewee as “*incomparable in Italy*”.¹⁴ A Pew Research survey in 2019 found that 83% of Italians held unfavourable views on Roma, the highest level of anti-Roma sentiment in Europe.¹⁵ Antigypsyism was given a boost by the ‘nomad emergency’ and has been sustained since by a top-down political rhetoric of stereotypes, hate speech, and sometimes incitement to violence in Italy.¹⁶

Romani communities have been routinely subjected to violent hate crimes and far-right hate marches in recent years in Italy. Entire camps have been burned to the ground by Molotov cocktails¹⁷, fascist gangs have blockaded access to social housing and homeless shelters allocated to Roma, and Romani women and children have been regularly harassed and attacked in the street by racist members of the public.¹⁸ In 2008, during the height

of the ‘nomad emergency’ two Romani girls aged 14 and 16 drowned swimming off the coast of Torregaveta, near Naples. Their bodies were dragged ashore and laid on the sand where local beachgoers continued to sunbathe, eat food, and continue with their day at the beach just meters away. Photographs published in the media showed Italians seemingly unfazed by the presence of the two Romani corpses nearby. The newspaper *Corriere della Sera* reported at the time: “Few left the beach or abandoned their sunbathing. When the police from the mortuary arrived an hour later with coffins, the two girls were carried away on the shoulders [of the officers] between bathers stretched out in the sun.”¹⁹

So-called ‘cultural barriers’ to Romani participation in sports, espoused by various interviewees, should be taken in this context of widespread, often unchecked antigypsyism in the country.

Gender-specific barriers to participation in sport and physical activity

The interviews revealed a mixed response as to the level of participation of Romani women and girls, as well as the causes for any under-participation. While it seems clear that female participation is significantly lower than male (as it is throughout society), there were few salient points as to how it manifests within Romani communities.

According to a coach of a women’s football team in Padua, women and girls from Roma and Sinti communities rarely participate in sport, but he also acknowledged that clubs do little to attract them. He mentioned how he had never had any girls from the local Sinti community in his club, only a few boys from one family played in the male team. He noted that “*maybe it*

13 Gorla, S. (2019) “Milan, ten years after the clearance of the via Rubattino camp: the new life of seventy Roma families”, Fanpage.it, 19 November 2019, Available (in Italian): <https://milano.fanpage.it/milano-dieci-anni-dallo-sgombero-del-campo-di-via-rubattino-la-nuova-vita-di-settanta-famiglie-rom/>

14 Interview 19: Human rights activist in Milan, 22 March 2023

15 Pew Research Centre (2019) “European Public Opinion Three Decades After The Fall Of Communism: Minority groups”, Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/minority-groups/>

16 Bernard Rorke (2023) “Antigypsyism in Italy: Virtual Hate and Real-Life Consequences”, ERRC News, 18 May 2023, Available: <http://www.errc.org/news/antigypsyism-in-italy-virtual-hate-and-real-life-consequences>

17 Peter Popham (2008) “Italian tolerance goes up in smoke as Gypsy camp is burnt to ground”, The Independent, 16 May 2008, Available: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italian-tolerance-goes-up-in-smoke-as-gypsy-camp-is-burnt-to-ground-829318.html>

18 European Roma Rights Centre (2020) “Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre, concerning Italy to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 66th session (9–13 March 2020)”, pages 6 – 7, Available: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/5193_file1_italy-cescr-21-august-2019.pdf

19 John Hooper (2008) “Gypsy girls’ corpses on beach in Italy fail to put off sunbathers”, The Guardian, 21 July 2008, Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/21/italy.race>

is also soccer which is already a sport in Italian society for men' so maybe it is also this. Maybe if the club offered another sport, then the Sinti women of this family would come closer.”²⁰

The coach also mentioned how care must be taken to ensure an inclusive atmosphere, as sports is not a neutral environment but a part of wider life which is biased and discriminatory towards Romani people and Romani women and girls in particular. An 18-year-old Romani man from Padua who played football with his local club was asked about gender inequality in sport participation in his community. He said:

“I don't know how to answer that question...but in my opinion, there is no difference...My sister, for example, she's now joined a gym too... my [female] cousins also do sport, if they want to. We don't tell them 'No, don't go do sport, there are bad people.' It's not like that.”

When asked how sports clubs could increase the number of Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti taking part in their sport, he replied:

“By going [to the camps], by talking, by going there, by showing up every day wanting to do sport and not

bullshitting... some social workers send people there for the kids to play... It's easier for the [sports] associations to go to the camps. Meeting new people would certainly be nice.”

His answer chimes with other successful local actions to bring Romani and non-Romani people together through genuine inclusion efforts. Gender discrepancies in access to sport seem to not be as black and white as they are often portrayed. The placing of blame on culture is not only culturally deterministic and intellectually lazy, but also a reductive argument that borders on racism. Cultural attitudes about sport within Romani communities are certainly a barrier to female participation, but one that would be surmountable if the exclusion of the communities was not so severe. Lack of infrastructure, racialised poverty, segregation, and exclusion are barriers that need to be simultaneously addressed to increase access for Romani women and girls in sport.

A Romani woman who participated in dance since a young age described how the key to any successful actions is through mutual trust and understanding, not simply expecting changes from Romani communities:

“In Via Germagnano [Turin], for example, five little girls who did dance with me, the parents let them participate because they knew me, there was a relationship of trust. However, you can say that there is a very imposing patriarchal system in the camps, in the marginalised part of the Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti communities.”



She especially emphasised that extreme patriarchal systems which deny Romani women and girls opportunities are products of exclusion and the ‘nomad

camps’ of Italy. “For Roma living “outside the camp” – she says – “males and females, the participation in my opinion is equal, of course though they are denying being Roma.”²¹

²⁰ Interview 21: Football coach of a women's team in Padua, 13 March 2023

²¹ Interview 18: Romani woman from Turin, 19 April 2023



SPAIN:

BARRIERS TO ROMANI SPORTS PARTICIPATION

The Romani population in Spain is estimated to be between 725,000 – 750,000.¹ However, this data is often assumed to be inaccurate as approximations for total figures have been formulated through various methods (approximate projections from previous studies, aggregates of local data calculated in different ways, studies on housing conditions that did not consider Romani people who do not live in predominantly Romani neighbourhoods, etc.). Thus, the calculations and estimations in Spain can range between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people or even higher.

Racialised poverty

The Romani population in Spain faces significant challenges and experiences high levels of poverty and social exclusion. According to a comparative study on the situation of the Romani population in Spain regarding employment and poverty by Fundación Secretariado Gitano in 2019,² 98% of Romani individuals are at risk of poverty and exclusion, compared to 27.8% of the general Spanish population.

Living in poverty deprives Romani individuals of the ability to meet their basic needs and access essential services. Many Romani people lack quality education, decent housing, proper sanitation, and adequate healthcare. These inequalities perpetuate a cycle of

marginalisation and hinder Romani individuals from fully participating in political, cultural, economic, and social activities such as sport.

Unemployment amongst the Romani population in Spain is 52%, significantly higher than the 14.4% unemployment rate among the general population. Women in the Romani community are disproportionately affected, with only 38.5% of Romani women being economically active, compared to 76.2% of Romani men. Additionally, a large proportion of Romani youth between the ages of 16 – 30 neither study nor work, and it is estimated that 58% of them are women. The average monthly salary received by Romani individuals is only 754 euros, and wage

¹ Government of Spain (2021) "National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021 – 2030", Available: https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/poblacion-gitana/docs/estrategia_nacional/Estrategia_nacional_21_30/Estrategia_aprob_cm_2_nov_ENGLISH.pdf

² Fundación Secretariado Gitano & Fundación ISEAK (2019) "Situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty", Available (in Spanish): <https://iseak.eu/en/documents/situacion-de-la-poblacion-gitana-en-espana-en-relacion-al-empleo-y-la-pobreza>

disparities are even more pronounced for Romani women.³ These economic challenges further exacerbate social exclusion and hinder the overall well-being of the Romani community. It is a huge barrier in accessing sport for the Romani population as the average income does not come close to meeting their basic needs. Racialised poverty was a theme identified through most of the interviews as the main barrier to accessing sport for Romani people in Spain.

Segregation and inadequate access to services

Housing conditions for Romani people are a significant concern. Approximately 2% of the Romani population in Spain, comprising more than 15,000 individuals, live in informal and isolated makeshift housing, without access to basic amenities such as running water. Many more Romani communities are confined to segregated and marginalised neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Spanish cities. These areas often lack essential public services and suffer from limited transportation connections to city centres. Furthermore, they are frequently surrounded by industrial zones, exposing residents to environmental pollution. Spatial segregation and inadequate public transport access has a direct impact on the ability of most Romani people to participate in organised sport or physical activity. On one hand, public administrations rarely provide proper sport infrastructure within segregated neighbourhoods while on the other hand transport to reach such facilities is not viable for people living in these areas.⁴

The Romani population also faces significant health disparities. The life expectancy of Romani individuals in Spain is 9 to 15 years lower than the national average.⁵ This alarming statistic underscores the need for targeted interventions to address health inequalities and improve access to quality healthcare services for the Romani community. It also highlights the crucial

role sport and improved physical activity could have in improving life expectancy as a basis of human health.

Amongst interviewees, the effect of segregation was considered the main barrier preventing Romani people from participating in sport and physical activity. Romani people living in mixed neighbourhoods (with better access to local amenities) have increased participation in sports, and in a greater variety of sports, including participating in mixed federated sports teams (such as 11-a-side football). An interviewee working at a municipality sports facility in Manresa said that while a minority of the Romani population practice sports regularly, there is a reasonable number who participate in a number of sports available in the municipality. The majority of those who do engage in sports play football or futsal by renting courts to play amongst themselves or in local leagues. More and more children are playing 11-a-side club football in mixed teams. He says a number also train at boxing clubs and many exercise at the gym as Manresa has no ghettoised area inhabited mostly by Romani people, meaning Romani people there live in integrated neighbourhoods and have better access to sport facilities and public services.⁶

A Barcelona city councillor and ex-president of a gymnastics club in the socially deprived La Mina district of the city also pointed to the barriers posed by neglected, poor, and ghettoised areas for residents to access sport and physical activity. He argues that such localities become chronically neglected by successive administrations when they develop a poor reputation, resulting in a deepening of segregation, underfunding, and exclusion. Pointing to short term projects and plans that he has seen being drawn up and then forgotten and left unimplemented, he says political will is needed to ensure success for participation schemes in the long run.⁷

³ *Idib*

⁴ Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales (2021) "Estrategia Nacional para la Igualdad, Inclusión y Participación del Pueblo Gitano 2021-2030" (NRSF), Available (in Spanish): https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/poblacion-gitana/docs/estrategia_nacional/Estrategia_nacional_21_30/estrategia_aprobada_com.pdf

⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022). "Roma survey 2021: Main results", Available: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf

⁶ Interview 23: Municipality worker at a sports facility in Manresa, 29 September 2023

⁷ Interview 24: Barcelona city councillor and ex-president of a gymnastics club in La Mina, 6 July 2023

Fear of racial abuse

While seemingly not a principal barrier for most Romani interviewees, many mentioned during their interview some kind of anxiety about being discriminated against by others on account of their ethnicity while participating in organised sport.

One young Romani man from Girona⁸ who played multiple sports as a child mentioned how he did not experience any racism at first at his basketball club because he was white-passing. However, when his team-mates found out he says there was increased conflict, tensions, and distance with them. Other players started making racist jokes about him stealing, as well as stereotypes about Romani people being overly aggressive. The abuse came from the majority of other players at the club, rather than one or two individuals, and resulted in his leaving the club because of it.

He also described how his participation in a basketball club (where Romani people did not normally play) inspired others from his community to play. His cousin now plays basketball for a local team, although he says she experiences the same treatment if not worse on account of her being female and Romani.

Gender-specific barriers to participation in sport and physical activity

The participation of Romani women and girls in sport and physical activity trails that of men and boys, particularly in marginalised communities. The financial situation of families, and the effects of marginalisation in segregated communities, was commonly mentioned by interviewees as a principal barrier to female sport participation for Romani individuals. An interviewed Romani woman, who played basketball to a high level, specifically attributes her participation in sport from a young age to the encouraging influence of her parents and their good socio-economic condition as a family.

“The economic aspect is super important. I mean... I was lucky that my parents could pay for me to play basketball and buy me the equipment and whatever I needed, you know? But of course, a boy or a girl who does not have that luck, that privilege, because it is a privilege to play sports in clubs, well... they can’t afford it.”

She also argues for the positive effect that female role models from the Romani community could have in encouraging young Romani girls to participate in sports.

THE COMBAT SPORTS EXCEPTION

Like others who participate in combat sports, the interviewee from Girona described how he has faced no negative treatment on account of his ethnicity since starting at a local boxing club:

“I’ve always liked sports, I’ve been trying out [different sports], I’ve done everything, and the truth is that where I am now, they know that I am Romani, and they treat me perfectly. I am another one of them, I am super comfortable, and that is the most important thing. I think the important thing is to do sports and, well, to have an active body and then to be treated well, to be comfortable in a place, that’s the best. That’s why the change [to boxing].”

An ex-professional Muay Thai fighter of Romani origin who was interviewed similarly spoke of the lack of obstacles in the sport on account of ethnicity. He attributes this to the multicultural makeup of combat sport clubs and says:

“In combat sports you’re all the same in that way – the distinction is more ‘you’re lazy’ or ‘you train well’ or ‘you’re fat’ because you weigh a lot. That’s true, if you’re overweight, there is discrimination because you’re always too fat [in Muay Thai].”

¹ Interview 25: Romani Thai-kickboxer from Alicante, 19 July 2023

⁸ Interview 26: Romani man from Girona, 9 July 2023

“I also believe that many role models are missing. The importance of role models in the world of sports is huge. We need boys and girls who say, “Wow, I want to be the future Alexia of Barça or the future Romani Messi.”⁹



The interviewed Muay Thai fighter believes that it is much harder for Romani women and girls to get into contact sports. His own parents at first refused to speak to him when he began training at a Muay Thai gym. They argued it was shameful and played into stereotypes of Romani people being aggressive. He believes that this parental protective instinct towards their children wanting to get into a ring and fight would certainly be stronger for Romani girls.

In his current job working at an educational support programme for disadvantaged children, he says there are very few Romani girls involved in sports (perhaps four or five). He believes it is necessary to show them a wide range of sports available to them and get them used to the idea of extra-curricular activities.

“These children are not used to staying after school hours to try out certain sports. What we try to do is to let them try a bit of everything, from climbing to playing paddle tennis, surfing, windsurfing, things that are different from what they are used to, and for the children to be able to explore different activities and if they like something, then they can stick with it.”

In Manresa, the interviewee working at a sports facility run by the municipality described significant differences in participation between boys and girls. He believes this is related to traditional gender roles in society and within Romani communities of “*domestic workloads, not because they are Romani per se, but in society, there is also a domestic burden, the responsibility of being a parent tends to fall much more on women than on fathers, right? And perhaps that makes Romani women do much less sport.*”¹⁰

Participatory sport schemes yield success

The Barcelona city councillor interviewed argued that solutions to Romani exclusion in sport can come through direct participation in electoral politics, pointing to the election of a Romani councillor in La Mina who can better respond to the needs of the Romani population in the area:

“The councillor of La Mina is a guy from La Mina, Francisco Vargas, and he is enabling us to make contact with all kinds of associations, entities, schools, and all that to try to do sports in La Mina like any other neighbourhood.”¹¹

Understanding the needs of Romani communities and children is crucial to designing access schemes which actually work for communities. The Romani interviewee working in an educational support programme with Romani children said of public institutions’ work with Roma – “*they always want them to participate in all activities, but they never consider the*

9 Interview 27: Romani woman from Vilassar de Mar, 11 July 2023

10 Interview 23: Municipality worker at a sports facility in Manresa, 29 September 2023

11 Interview 24: Barcelona city councillor and ex-president of a gymnastics club in La Mina, 6 July 2023

Romani perspective. They approach it from an ethnocentric point of view where the only thing that matters is ‘we collect our numbers’, and that’s it, but they don’t care about whether, for example, a child likes a specific sport. They just do it in general and that’s it.”

The importance of making a variety of sports available to working class people in general was a thread that ran through all the interviews. Interviewees acknowledged that football is not the *only* sport and if sport is supposed to be for everyone then attempts should be made by local authorities to make sure that the variety existing in sport is put on offer. Interviewed Romani athletes who competed at an elite level in Spain had each tried multiple sports when they were younger, and each had impacts on their communities to increase participation and even educational outcomes.

A Romani women’s sport organiser from the Basque Country also described in interview how a multi-sport approach was crucial to improving access to sport for Romani women. Her project started as a group of female athletes, including a Taekwondo champion, a basketball player, and a professional dancer, who started training female Romani people in their area in multiple sport disciplines. They also held talks and workshops on antigypsyism, including open lunch sessions where women could talk about their own interest in sports or how they were unable to participate earlier in life. The programme has since expanded to include camps where they play tennis, provide canoeing trips, paddle surfing, rugby, and pelota.¹²

The successes from Romani-run, Romani-participated initiatives can be immense. When Romani communities see something created by and for themselves and “*not some institution telling them what to do*” they feel ownership over it according to a Romani man who organised a hugely successful seven-a-side football league in Barcelona.¹³ The *King’s League Gitana* is a Romani take on Gerard Piqué’s hugely successful ‘King’s League’ tournament which features alternative football

rules and the use of ‘secret weapon’ cards such as a penalty kick, the exclusion of an opposing player for two minutes, a goal to be worth double for two minutes, or the ability to steal an opposing team’s secret weapon card. The league, like its Romani counterpart, was born in Barcelona and relies on its availability on Twitch, TikTok, and YouTube livestreams with direct audience interaction for its successes.

The King’s League Gitana began as a pre-league with four teams which got bigger as more streamers joined until Piqué invited them to join his King’s League. The activities had no direct funding and were entirely self-organised by young Romani amateurs: from the financing to the players, the referees, bookkeeping, player sanctions, and community outreach neighbourhood to neighbourhood. The league grew so popular with other cities wanting to join that in the end they created two divisions with 16 teams. The organiser interviewed said that “*there has always been this thing with Gypsies that they don’t do sports, that they are all fat and so it was a challenge that I felt I had to do it. And I saw it very clearly that it would go viral.*” There are now parallel Romani leagues in Madrid, Bilbao, Valencia, and other cities. There are two women’s teams in Barcelona from Zona Franca and La Mina with the hopes of expanding to a *Queen’s League* soon.

The organiser stressed that the competitive nature was important. He argues that while many sports participation programmes focus on participation as an end goal, the King’s League Gitana is pure sport and so not everyone is going to win and that is normal and even to be celebrated. Additionally, the viral nature of the activity (and the various celebrity endorsements) meant that society saw value in it. It was seen as a positive thing in general, aside from the positive gains for the Romani communities involved. The interviewee argued for the effectiveness of using such an approach to fight against antigypsyism, one which has nothing to do with culture or history. He acknowledged that while these things are important, positive projects such as the King’s League Gitana show us a modern approach to countering social exclusion and racism. ■

¹² Interview 28: Romani woman from the Basque Country, 10 July 2023

¹³ Interview 29: Romani man from Barcelona, 26 September 2023

Inclusion Through Sport

The interviews across all countries yielded generally positive opinions on the benefits of sport as a tool of non-discrimination and inclusion. All interviewees named the obvious health benefits, both physical and mental, for anyone participating in sport and some also argued this was to the increased benefit of Romani and Traveller communities who on the whole have significantly worse health outcomes than the rest of society. A representative of Sport Ireland, the statutory body regulating sport in the country, pointed to the huge benefits in terms of health outcomes for Travellers in particular:

“The suicide rate is so high in the Traveller community...if you’ve got more Travellers participating in regular sport, you know physical activity in whatever form that takes, I would expect that rate [suicide rate] should come down. There’s potential for the Traveller community that there be massive improvements in standard of life and different outcomes, you know health outcomes and mental health outcomes if they participated more in sports. So, the benefits there are huge.”¹

¹ Interview 12: Representative of Sport Ireland, 26 September 2023



A Policy Officer within the Sport Unit of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture pointed to a lack of studies actually proving the impact that sport has on reducing the risk of social exclusion. The interviewee highlighted the risk of minority groups forming sport teams or clubs based on ethnicity which in their opinion does not favour integration. The work of the Sport Unit was described as “*very broad*” and not focussing in on individual minorities too much in its

projects, but adopting inclusive measures which apply to everyone equally. That is, apart from the time in which there were a number of terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, and during the refugee crisis, when the idea of sport to combat ‘radicalisation’ was prioritised.²

The European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, argued in favour of sport and physical activity as a direct tool of inclusion and non-discrimination in Europe (even while EU policy documents are somewhat less explicit on this):

“Sport is a vehicle of our common European values of equality and non-discrimination, and working towards the equal participation of the most disadvantaged groups in our society is at the core of our work in building a Union of Equality.”³

² Interview 3: Pier Marcello Corrado, Policy Officer for Inclusion, Sport Unit, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, 12 September 2023

³ Interview 2: Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, 7 June 2023

CONCLUSIONS

CZECH REPUBLIC:

The Czech Republic is fully cognisant of the potential role of sport as a tool of social cohesion between intersecting groups of citizens. This is particularly evident in its “Sports Support Concept 2016 – 2025”. The Czech government highlights the values of “equality and justice” in sport in its policy documents. In reality, local antigypsyism from authorities and schools stymies attempts to make use of sport’s “ability to combat xenophobia through actively developing a multicultural society” as imagined in policy documents. Widespread racialised poverty and spatial segregation creates a near absolute barrier to sport and physical activity participation for Roma in the country. Poor access to public transport,

inadequate housing, and poor access to infrastructure, especially water, make sports and physical activity a difficult prospect for large numbers of Roma. This disproportionately affects women and girls within Romani communities. Throughout Europe, education is generally the primary access point for sport for children. In the Czech Republic, school segregation and the illegal placement of Romani children in schools for children with mental and learning difficulties confounds any access to sport they might have in education. Outside of school, outright exclusion and persecution by non-Roma in sports clubs or sports facilities mean that Roma are either denied access to these services or made to feel so unwelcome and unsafe they do not attend.

In general, the level of societal prejudice towards Roma is major factor in spaces where Roma are considered ‘allowed’. A 2021 poll of 2000 Czechs aged 15 – 30 found that 86% of respondents found coexistence with Roma in the country as problematic (although it found significantly more progressive views amongst the youngest respondents).¹ Successes found in the country were virtually entirely at a local level and run by third sector organisations or Roma themselves, rather than local authorities. Women and girls’ participation was all but written off by many interviewees due to the incredibly poor situation and lack of perceived interest.

¹ Hate Free (2021) “Research on the attitudes of young Czechs towards human rights and the rights of endangered minorities”, Available (in Czech): <https://www.hatefree.cz/clanky/vyzkum-postoju-mladych-cechu-k-lidskym-pravum-a-pravum-ohrozenych-mensin-2>

IRELAND:

Ireland's National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027 identifies Sport Ireland as the main actor for participation and engagement through cooperation with local sport partnerships. In interview for this project, Sport Ireland were convincingly well-meaning but lacking in Traveller-specific policy or costed, data-driven plans for participation of Travellers in sport at different levels. The planned use of European Social Funds to implement new projects aimed at encouraging minority participation is thought to be a step in the right direction towards targeted Traveller policy on sport.

Ireland's inclusion strategies would be adequate to meet many of the needs of Travellers if properly implemented. If they were budgeted and followed through on by local authorities, they could bring about real change for Travellers in terms of alleviating the deficit of rights and allowing for greater sport participation. However, local level public authorities create hurdles to implementation of inclusion strategies. For example, an Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report found that a third of Traveller-specific accommodation funds were returned unspent by local authorities between 2008 and 2018 across the country.²

Discrepancies in perceived barriers to Traveller participation in sport existed between Travellers themselves and those working in sport associations.

Travellers themselves, and several studies and NGOs, identified discrimination and the effects of exclusion (including racialised poverty) as primary barriers preventing Travellers participating in sport and physical activity. While discrimination did not go unmentioned by those representing sports associations, it was primarily relegated to a second or third barrier to participation, with Traveller culture being perceived as the main problem.

In sport at local level, the situation is as much about prejudice from other players as it is neglect from local level clubs to encourage participation of Travellers. Despite the mostly good intentions from sports associations and statutory bodies, local sports clubs and partnerships often neglect Traveller communities and female Traveller participation in particular (with a few notable exceptions such as St. Patrick's GAA club in Wicklow Town).



The use of role models, while highlighted as a great tool of improving participation by both Travellers and those

working in sport, was viewed by Travellers with greater caution. Hate speech on social media was identified as a huge barrier preventing Travellers in sport from self-identifying and being held up as a role model. Care should be taken to ensure Travellers being spotlighted in the public eye are emotionally and mentally ready for the knock-on effects of their participation. Boxing was the one sport where Travellers participated without barrier and where there were existing role models competing at a high level in the public eye.

The low participation of Traveller women and girls in organised sport was taken as a given by many interviewees. Increasing access for this group can only come through participatory, targeted access schemes which make extra effort to ensure that participation is encouraged for Traveller women and girls.

² Irish Independent (2021) "Councils criticised as €58m for Traveller accommodation goes unspent for a decade", 14 July 2021, Available: <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/councils-criticised-as-58m-for-traveller-accommodation-goes-unspent-for-a-decade/40650757.html>

ITALY:

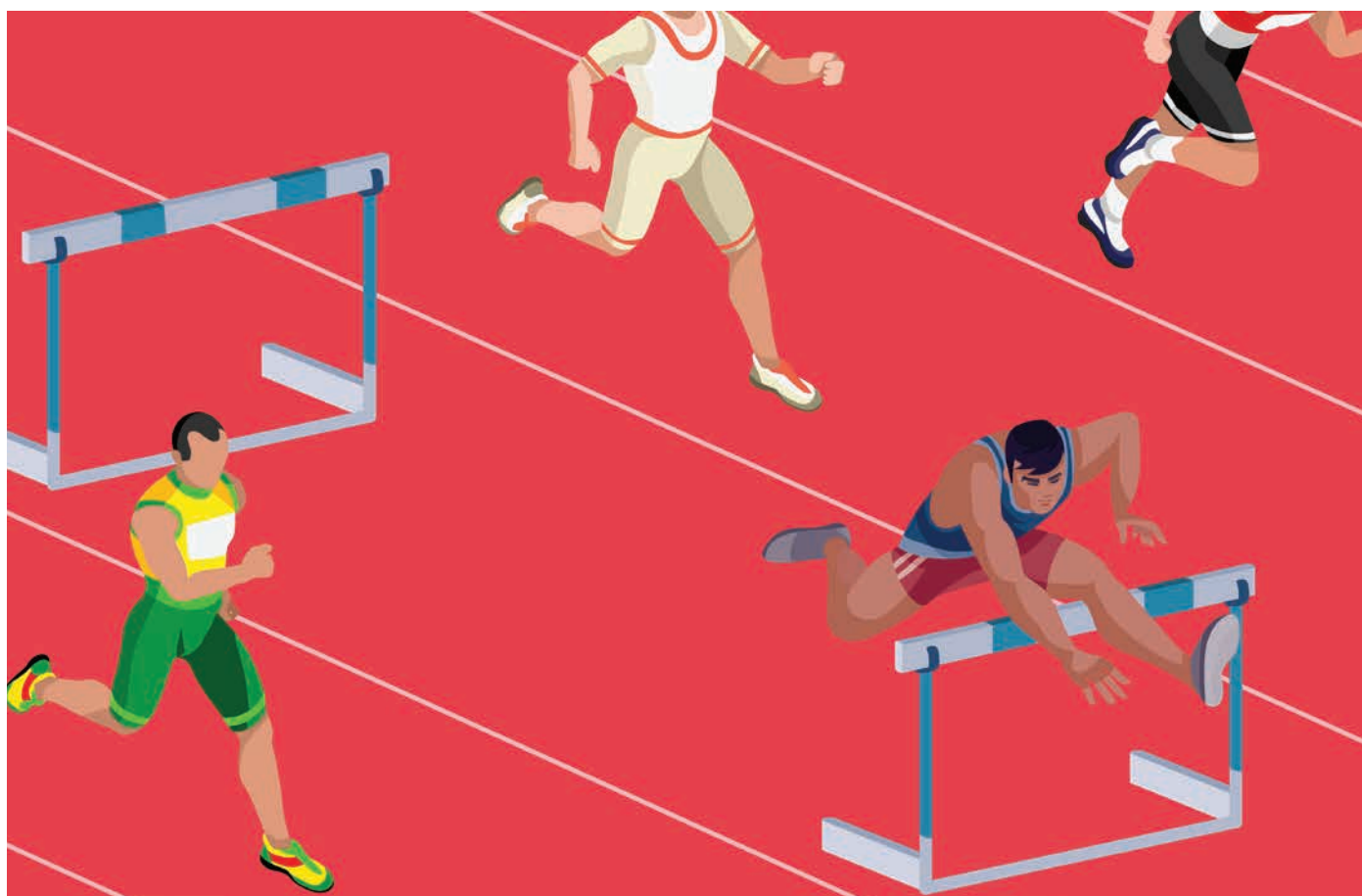
Whilst the securitisation of Romani peoples continues through successive national governments, the practical impossibility of national actions for Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti sport inclusion as a tool of anti-discrimination was made very apparent during the research. The current presence of governing parties with actively anti-Roma ideologies further hinders any possibility of such progressive changes.

The legacy of Italy's 'nomad emergency' era security policies against Roma further entrench segregation, which was found to be

the main barrier to participation for Romani communities. The effects of racialised poverty and exclusion made for very limited sport and physical activity participation for Roma and Sinti from marginalised communities. Those living in integrated settings, away from the so-called 'nomad camps', were thought to have significantly better chances for participating in organised sport (especially women and girls).

Low educational participation as a result of exclusion was a major barrier to children participating in sport. In both education and the effects of marginalisation on communities, women and girls

lose out more than men and boys. Gender inequalities are less severe in non-segregated settings and the possibility of increased female participation becomes a reality. The high level of antigypsyism in Italian society creates a near impossible environment for targeted sport participation actions at a regional or national level. While local successes are certainly possible, they rely on individuals or third sector workers rather than public authorities. Interviewees expressed the need for dialogue and targeted actions to alleviate conditions in the camps. Sport could be a starting point for such dialogue.





SPAIN:

A lack of consideration of sport and inclusion through sport at a national level is met with differing levels of awareness at an autonomous regional level. There are 17 autonomous communities that do not have a Romani inclusion strategy. The remaining 8 have created inclusion strategies, but many are out of date and usually with little consideration of access to sport for Romani populations. Generally, where sport is mentioned in these strategies, it is viewed in terms of public health policy where Romani people are a target group with particularly low health outcomes. The use of sport as a tool of inclusion and anti-discrimination is absent.

Like other countries, the effects of racialised poverty and exclusion were here too found to be the

principal barrier to Romani participation in sport and physical activity. Discrimination and fear of racial abuse was additionally mentioned by interviewees as a factor which limited participation of Romani people in Spain. As in Ireland, combat sport seemed exempt from these criteria.

Boxing and Muay Thai gyms were identified by interviewees as spaces free of prejudice towards Romani people (or seemingly any groups of people). Access to these sports for Romani women and girls remains limited, however.

A lack of political will to specifically improve sport access for Romani communities was mentioned by interviewees, as well as a lack of understanding of the positive benefits of sport as a tool of improving health outcomes for Romani people and as a tool of

anti-discrimination and inclusion. Conversely, the election of a Romani councillor in Barcelona is alleged to better serve the needs of the Romani community there, including through access to sports. Several initiatives created by Romani people themselves to serve Romani communities showed significant success in encouraging participation in organised sport. Particularly when aimed at women and girls and run by Romani women themselves, such participatory activities allowed a greater number of Romani people to engage with sport and even use sport as a tool to address structural inequalities and antigypsyism. Local authorities could learn from these approaches to emulate them and include costed provision for these programmes in their strategies. ■

Six Considerations

for Europe on Roma, Sinti, and Traveller Participation in Sport

1 THE FAR-REACHING DAMAGE CAUSED BY ANTIGYPSYISM.

Across the four countries, discrimination and exclusion was found to be the primary barrier to Romani and Traveller communities enjoying access to sport and physical activity in each of the study countries. Amongst Romani and Traveller people interviewed, discrimination or fear of discrimination was commonly brought up as a barrier to accessing sport. Just as commonly mentioned were barriers brought about by racialised poverty and segregation. In contrast, non-Roma interviewees were far more likely to consider Romani and Traveller cultures as a barrier to sport participation. With notable exceptions, the majority considered the apparent insular nature of Romani and Traveller communities to be a primary barrier to participation in general with in-built patriarchal norms being the main barrier to the participation of Romani women and girls.

3 GENDER INEQUALITY IN SPORT PARTICIPATION

Patriarchal community values are certainly a barrier to the participation of Romani and Traveller women and girls in organised sport. However, there was little to suggest this to be an intrinsic part of Romani and Traveller cultures (that is, any more than it

is a part of most cultures). The majority of interviewees belonging to these communities highlighted structural discrimination and exclusion as being a primary driver of gender inequality within their communities. As in all marginalised communities, the effects of exclusion and systemic racism tend to be disproportionately felt by women and girls in Romani and Traveller communities. Women's Rights issues affecting Romani and Traveller communities can be considered a result of wider discrimination rather than a determining feature of their culture. Just as poverty is not a part of Romani culture, the subjugation of women and girls is not either.

2 LACK OF TARGETED ACTIONS AIMED AT ROMA, SINTI, AND TRAVELLERS

A general problem found across the four countries was missing participation schemes aimed specifically at improving the participation of Romani and Traveller communities in sport and physical activity. National governments, local authorities, and often sport associations failed to adopt Romani-specific or Traveller-specific access schemes. The problem was more acute when Romani and Traveller women and girls' participation is considered. There is little done to actively encourage Romani and

Traveller women and girls to participate in sport and physical activity at all levels. Lazy cultural assumptions described earlier result in these women and girls becoming doubly discriminated against and further neglected by duty bearers, sports clubs, and even civil society on account of their gender and ethnic identity.

4 THE COMBAT SPORT EXCEPTION

While prejudicial attitudes were reported in just about every sport that Romani and Traveller people participated in, combat sports stood out for their apparent inclusiveness. Travellers in Ireland and Romani people in Spain reported combat sport cultures that embrace diversity at boxing and Muay Thai gyms. The multicultural nature of some of these gyms was suggested as a potential reason for this, as well as the culture of the sport itself which rewards individual hard work in a supportive and meritocratic environment where perceived ethnic affiliation becomes less relevant. The absence of female participation in combat sports was noted also in both countries. More efforts could be made to understand and replicate successes of combat sport in overcoming discrimination and embracing inclusion of Romani and Traveller athletes.

5 A LACK OF VISIBLE ROMANI AND TRAVELLER ROLE MODELS IN SPORT

The need for positive success stories as a tool of encouraging participation for Roma, Sinti, and Travellers was mentioned by interviewees from all countries as well as at a European level. Considering the size of the Romani population in Europe (likely to be now significantly greater than the 12 million estimated in 2012), the number of self-identifying Romani and Traveller athletes at an elite level is disproportionately low. Reasons include those already mentioned related to antigypsyism, but also a reluctance on the part Romani and Traveller athletes to self-identify with their ethnicity for fear of prejudice.

Actors seeking to promote Romani and Traveller athletes as role models should bear in mind how they intend to cater for the emotional and mental wellbeing of those who they would shine a spotlight on. The degree of hate speech, particularly online, as well as potentially negative career consequences are considerable barriers to Romani and Traveller athletes agreeing to be identified in such a way.

6 SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION PROGRAMMES ARE POSSIBLE IF THEY ARE FOR ROMA AND TRAVELLERS AND BY ROMA AND TRAVELLERS.

Participatory models where Romani and Traveller people feel ownership of the activities have better chances of sustainable, long-term success than other models. Romani and Traveller interviewees expressed the need for genuine dialogue, trust, and reliability from those attempting to improve sport participation within excluded communities. When Romani and Traveller people are included in the design of such participation programmes, and are the primary contact point with communities, then more durable patterns of sport participation can be created beyond the duration of a specific project or strategy.

For Romani and Traveller women and girls, targeted community outreach over much longer periods should follow the same participatory model to ensure that the extra barriers they face on account of their gender identity are addressed. ■

ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

EU:

Representative of ENGSO The European Sports NGO, 19 April 2023

Helena Dalii, European Commissioner for Equality, 7 June 2023

Pier Marcello Corrado, Policy Officer for Inclusion, Sport Unit, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, 12 September 2023

Czech Republic:

Social worker from Rotava, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

Social worker from Kladno, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

Two football coaches and community workers from Moravský Beroun, Czech Republic, 25 October 2023

Football coach from Plzeň, 2 November 2023

Public Official working for the South Moravian Region, Czech Republic, 27 October 2023

Ireland:

Traveller man in Finglas, Dublin, 5 July 2023

Traveller man in Dublin, 28 August 2023

Geraldine McTavish, GAA Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, 5 October 2023

Representative of Sport Ireland, 26 September 2023

Representative of the Football Association of Ireland, 13 October 2023

Representative of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 13 October 2023

Representative of the Olympic Federation in Ireland, 13 October 2023

Traveller man in Leinster, 13 October 2023

Traveller man in Dublin County, 13 October 2023

Italy:

Romani woman from Turin, 19 April 2023

Human rights activist in Milan, 22 March 2023

Representative of the Municipality of Padua, a social policy councillor, and three social workers, 19 April 2023

Football coach of a women's team in Padua, 13 March 2023

Romani man from Padua, 1 June 2023

Spain:

Municipality worker at a sports facility in Manresa, 29 September 2023

Barcelona city councillor and ex-president of a gymnastics club in La Mina, 6 July 2023

Romani Thai-kickboxer from Alicante, 19 July 2023

Romani man from Girona, 9 July 2023

Romani woman from Vilassar de Mar, 11 July 2023

Romani woman from the Basque Country, 10 July 2023

Romani man from Barcelona, 26 September 2023

