



Romni Rising

The voice of young Roma women in Poland

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Introduction

Discussions about the future of Roma communities in Europe often refer to young people as symbols of change, resilience, and transformation. At the same time, the voices of young Roma women remain significantly underrepresented in public debate, research, and public policy-making processes. Romani women are still more often talked about than talked to, and the perspectives of the younger generation, especially women navigating the intersection of education, migration, and changing gender norms, are rarely treated as sources of expert knowledge.

This report presents the results of qualitative research on young Roma women—representatives of Generation Z living in Poland, including women with migration and refugee experience. The study was designed not only to document experiences, but also as a conscious attempt to create a space in which young Roma women could independently articulate their own understanding of identity, aspirations, limitations, agency, and solidarity.

Young Roma women today grow up at the intersection of many social worlds. They navigate between expectations rooted in family and community traditions and the demands of the majority society, educational institutions, the labor market, and digital environments. Their lives unfold within complex power structures shaped by gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and, for some participants, experiences of migration and forced displacement. These factors fundamentally influence how identity is experienced, how the future is imagined, and how agency is exercised.

The study deliberately refrained from seeking a single, “representative” narrative. Instead, it highlighted a multiplicity of perspectives, contradictions, and reflexivity. The participants spoke about their daily lives, education, work, motherhood, creativity, faith, experiences of discrimination, and sense of belonging. Their narratives reveal a generation that is deeply aware of structural barriers, yet capable of negotiating, reinterpreting, and acting within existing constraints.

Importantly, this report challenges deficit narratives that primarily portray Romani women as vulnerable and in need of intervention. While acknowledging the material and symbolic inequalities faced by many participants, the study highlights strategies of resilience, care, creativity, and collective support. Young Roma women do not appear as passive recipients of public policies, but as active individuals shaping new forms of Roma identity and femininity.

This report should therefore be read both as an analytical contribution and as a political intervention. By placing the voices of young Roma women at the center, this document calls for research, political, and cultural practices that recognize Roma women as holders of knowledge and experience as essential for understanding contemporary Roma realities and designing inclusive, forward-looking strategies.

1. Methodology

1.1. Research design

The study was conducted based on a qualitative research design rooted in interpretive and participatory approaches. Its main objective was to capture the ways in which young Roma women themselves describe key areas of their lives, including identity, aspirations, barriers, agency, and solidarity. Rather than testing pre-formulated hypotheses, the study aimed to generate knowledge inductively, allowing the main themes to emerge directly from the participants' narratives.

The research project was inspired by feminist, intersectional, and anthropological perspectives that emphasize the importance of lived experience, relationality, and the co-creation of knowledge. Particular attention was paid to avoiding extractive practices and creating research conditions that allowed participants to go beyond socially expected or externally imposed narratives.

1.2. Research methods and tools

Data collection was carried out using:

- 10 in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with young Roma women and
- 2 focus group interviews with young Roma women living in Poland, including women with migration and refugee experience (8 women).

The respondents were selected on the basis of non-probabilistic purposive sampling (arbitrary – *purposive sampling, judgemental sampling*)¹. The questionnaires for both types of interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Most of the questions in the questionnaires were about assessing facts and opinions². Individual interviews created space for personal reflection and in-depth biographical narratives, while group interviews allowed for the observation of group dynamics, common problems, and forms of mutual support. In addition, participant observation was used to capture nonverbal interactions, emotional reactions, and the relational nature of the research meetings.

1 A type of non-random sample in which individuals are selected who, according to the researcher's subjective assessment, are to be the most useful or representative" – as cited in: E. Babbie, *Badania spo/eczne w praktyce* [Social Research in Practice], Warsaw 2007, p. 629.

2 Questions about the assessment of facts and events are those whose answers are supposed to contain the actual assessment of the issues under study by the respondent; questions about opinion are those aimed at learning about the respondent's proposals and solutions to the issues under study – cf. Grzegorz Babiński, *Methodology and Social Reality. Dilemmas of Ethnic Research*, Krakow 2004, pp. 109-110.

The partially structured nature of the conversations ensured flexibility, allowing participants to steer the conversation toward topics they considered most important. This approach proved particularly important in the context of discussing sensitive issues such as experiences of discrimination, family expectations, motherhood, faith, and contacts with public institutions.

1.3. Research participants

The study involved young Roma women (Generation Z – those born between 1995 and 2012) living in Poland, including:

- women born and raised in Poland, and
- women with migration and refugee experience, mainly from Ukraine.

The participants represented diverse life situations, including school-girls and students, young professionals, artists, young mothers, and women living in collective accommodation centers. This diversity made it possible to capture a wide spectrum of experiences shaped by age, migration status, family responsibilities, and access to resources.

The designations of the participants used in the report ensure anonymity while maintaining analytical transparency.

1.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical sensitivity was central to the entire research process. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study, and particular attention was paid to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. At the same time, ethical practice went beyond formal procedures.

Research meetings were designed to prioritize emotional safety, respect, and reciprocity. Participants were not required to justify their identity, explain their basic cultural framework, or defend their legitimacy. The presence of researchers and facilitators of Roma origin and/or with long-term experience working with Roma communities helped to reduce power asymmetries and build trust.

In many cases, individual and group interviews became spaces for mutual recognition and support. Although this was not a direct goal of the study, this phenomenon highlights an important ethical dimension:

for groups that are often silenced or misrepresented, the very experience of being listened to attentively can be significant. Rather than undermining analytical rigor, this relational approach enabled greater honesty, depth, and reflectiveness in the participants' statements.

1.5. Positioning of researchers and reflexivity

The study takes into account the fact that the process of knowledge production is shaped by the positioning of the researchers. Their background, experiences, and relationships influenced their access to participants, the level of trust, and the interpretation of empirical material. Reflexivity was therefore treated as a continuous methodological practice rather than a one-time declaration.

The study was embedded in long-term engagement with Roma communities in order to limit performative responses and create conditions in which participants could speak from the perspective of lived experience rather than strategic self-presentation.

1.6. Limitations of the study

As a qualitative study, this paper is not statistically representative. The study does not claim to represent all young Roma women in Poland or Europe. Instead, it offers an in-depth insight into experiences that often remain invisible in quantitative data and political debates.

Some of the research meetings were affected by language barriers, emotional fatigue related to migration and life uncertainty, and time constraints. These limitations are not treated solely as methodological weaknesses, but as a reflection of the structural conditions in which the study participants function.

2. Research findings

When discussing the results of the aforementioned research, we decided to select several thematic areas within which we conducted our analysis. It was important for us to learn about the opinions of young Roma women on their own situation in terms of personal, intra-group, and social relationships, including mutual support among women, as well as the aspirations and dreams of our respondents. It was also crucial to understand the role of identity and cultural values in shaping attitudes and building one's own identity and future. We therefore decided to analyze and present the results of the research in the following thematic areas: Identity and the experience of being a young Roma woman; Dreams and visions of the future; Inspirations and role models; Barriers and limitations; Spaces of freedom and agency; Voice, solidarity, and new forms of sisterhood.

2.1. Identity and the experience of being a young Roma woman

For most participants, Roma identity was described as a deeply emotional and lived experience, not just an inherited one. Being Roma was associated with pride, but also with tension, between a sense of belonging and the need for self-determination, between strength and exhaustion resulting from entrenched stereotypes. Identity did not appear as a fixed category, but as a process shaped by relationships, social expectations, and everyday negotiations.

Many women described their identity as a space of constant balancing: between the expectations within the Roma community and the demands of the majority society; between loyalty to tradition and the pursuit of personal autonomy. The following statements emerged:

"Being a Roma woman means having the courage to feel, to care, to survive, to remain yourself even when the world already has an opinion about you." **PL1³**

"Among Roma people, I sometimes feel too Polish, and among Poles, too Roma. I stopped trying to fit in, I just do what I feel is right for me." **PL2**

3 Anonymized identifiers were used for the research participants in the following manner: in the case of individual interviews, the identifier includes the country code (PL or UKR) and the sequential number of the interviewee's statements; in the case of group interviews, the identifier includes F (for focus), the country code (PL or UKR), and the sequential number of the statements quoted.

"I feel not only as a Roma woman, but as a woman, as a female figure, and also as a Polish woman. I am not only Roma, and I am not only Polish. For me, this is being brave." **PL3**

Women with migration experience articulated this feeling of being "in between" even more clearly. Living far away from their extended family and familiar community structures, they described identity as both a source of loss and a key resource for resilience.

"I have no one here, but when I hear someone speaking Romani, I immediately feel at home. It gives me strength, even if everything else has changed." **UKR1**

Several interviews emphasized that Romani identity cannot be reduced to visible markers or external symbols such as clothing or appearance. Younger participants particularly objected to narrow or essentialist definitions of Romani femininity, locating identity rather in memory, values, language, and lived experience:

"Roma identity does not reside in clothing or appearance. It is in memory, in values, in what we carry within ourselves." **PL4**

Negotiating identity was often described as situational rather than an internal conflict. Some women spoke openly about adapting their language, behavior, or self-presentation in institutional and public contexts to avoid misunderstandings or discrimination:

"Sometimes I adapt because people don't understand me. I adapt so that they can understand me." **UKR2**

Others mentioned the need to prove their worth to the outside world and to strive to be perceived individually, not stereotypically:

„In my opinion, it is also a bit difficult to be a Roma because people judge everyone the same. For example, when I go to a store and people or security guards see me... I have a long skirt and a dark face, and some people think that I want to steal something, that's how they look at me... So it's not easy, we are judged at every turn.” PL3

At the same time, younger interviewees without migration experience more often described a sense of coherence between different contexts of life, family, school, and peer group, which might indicate a generational change in terms of self-confidence and social position.

“My family accepts me, my friends accept me. I can be myself.” PL5

“I know that the most important thing is who I really am. That I am natural and in harmony with myself and truthful.” PL3

Throughout the research material, identity was not presented solely as a burden, but also as a source of strength, creativity, and self-awareness. The participants consistently rejected victimizing narratives, emphasizing their ability to define themselves independently. Most also emphasized pride in their origins, as in the following quote:

„I can say that I am proud of who I am. Yes, I am proud because I also know that I represent this culture, being in this Polish and Romani society, that since my performance, I have become, so to speak, an ambassador for this culture. (...) PL3

The same respondent also pointed out that this comes with a great sense of responsibility for representing the community:

"It's a bit of pressure, and I have to be prepared and focused on it, that I have to know what I'm saying, how I'm saying it, how I'm expressing myself every time." **PL3**

The collected accounts show that the identity of young Roma women is an active, reflective practice, shaped by gender, age, migration status, and socioeconomic position, and at the same time constantly reinterpreted and renegotiated in everyday life.

2.2. Dreams and visions of the future

Contrary to entrenched stereotypes that portray Roma women as unambitious or lacking in future orientation, the study participants articulated clear and often very specific visions of their own lives. Their aspirations were rooted in the realities of everyday life and focused on stability, education, creative expression, family well-being, and dignity, rather than success in the abstract sense:

"I would like to have a small house close to nature, where women could come, talk, create, and just breathe." **PL6**

"I don't dream of wealth. I dream of my children being safe and healthy." **UKR3**

Dreams were rarely individualistic in nature. Personal success was described as valuable primarily when it contributed to the well-being of the family and community. Education and learning were often seen as tools for empowering agency, broadening horizons, and opening up new opportunities for the future.

For women affected by migration, forced displacement, and poverty, thinking about the future was often limited by the need to cope with immediate existential needs. In these contexts, aspirations did not disappear, but were postponed, and attention was focused on providing basic stability for children:

"When my children are not hungry, then I am in a good mood." **PL7**

"I will feel better when the war is over." **FUKR1**

These statements illustrate how, in conditions of uncertainty and precariousness, the future is "squeezed" into the present. The very act of dreaming then takes on the character of a resilience strategy rather than a concrete plan of action.

At the same time, younger participants, who have greater access to education and social capital, more often described the future as a space of many possible life trajectories rather than a single, predetermined scenario. Importantly, this multiplicity was interpreted as freedom rather than a source of uncertainty:

"There are two paths: family life or independence. I haven't chosen yet, and maybe that's what freedom is." **FPL1**

Religious and spiritual visions of the future added an extra dimension to the participants' aspirations. For some women, fulfillment was primarily framed in spiritual terms, emphasizing health, moral order, and family unity, rather than socioeconomic advancement.

2.3. Inspirations and role models

The main source of inspiration for young Roma women were women from their immediate environment: mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and peers. These figures were valued not for their visibility or formal status, but for their resilience, responsibility, and moral strength manifested in everyday life:

"The strongest women are those who never call themselves strong, they just keep going." **PL4**

"I am inspired by such people, such women who stand up to everything and prove the truth." **PL3**

Mothers emerged in the interviews as central figures of reference, particularly for their ability to combine care, perseverance, and self-determination in difficult circumstances:

“My mother inspires me because, no matter what life threw at her, she was strong and raised her children on her own.” **PL5**

Older Roma women were also often described as bearers of authority and wisdom. Participants emphasized their role as informal decision-makers, which complicates simplified notions of Roma communities as uniformly patriarchal.

There were also voices about the great suffering that Roma women face on a daily basis:

“Roma women are strong, but they also suffer a lot in their hearts. Sometimes it is very hard for them.” **PL3**

In addition to family figures, some participants pointed to artists, activists, and women involved in education or public life as an important sources of inspiration, especially those who showed that it is possible to follow one’s own path while maintaining ties to Romani identity:

“I want to be a proof to other girls that you can follow your own path and still preserve your roots.” **PL4**

Importantly, inspiration was increasingly horizontal rather than hierarchical. Young women spoke of drawing strength from relationships with peers who had similar experiences, which reinforced collective rather than competitive models of empowerment:

“When I listen to other women’s stories, I see myself in them—and I know I’m not alone.” **FPL2**

Some of the interviewees also pointed to learning from other women in terms of strengthening self-esteem, personal competencies, or professional skills using online resources:

“I also watch a lot of podcasts on how to change, how to be a businesswoman, just regular stuff on YouTube. Different girls post about how to change your habits, some feminine tricks, just to be a better woman, a classy businesswoman.” **PL3**

Taken together, these narratives show that role models for young Romani women are not exceptional figures detached from everyday life, but relational examples rooted in shared experience. Inspiration functions here as a collective resource that strengthens solidarity and broadens the horizons of what young Romani women can imagine for their own lives.

2.4. Barriers and limitations

Despite the clarity of their aspirations and the presence of many forms of agency, the participants described persistent and multi-layered barriers shaping their everyday lives. These limitations functioned simultaneously at the social, cultural, and institutional levels and were experienced as cumulative rather than isolated obstacles.

At the social level, discrimination in access to work, housing, and public services was repeatedly pointed out. Several women described strategies for hiding their Roma identity, including refraining from disclosing their origin as a way to avoid rejection or mistreatment:

“When an employer finds out that I am Roma, suddenly there are no more vacancies.” **FPL3**

For women with migration and refugee experience, social barriers were further reinforced by economic insecurity, lack of stable accommodation, and limited access to childcare. These factors significantly limited their ability to participate in education, work, or language learning:

"The hardest thing is when my child asks for milk and I have only one zloty in my pocket." **FUKR2**

Institutional barriers were often described not as overt hostility, but as bureaucratic indifference, delays, and a lack of real responsiveness. Women spoke of long waiting times, unclear procedures, and emotional exhaustion resulting from having to repeatedly explain their situation to various institutions:

"When I ask for help, they tell me to wait. But sometimes there is nothing left to wait for." **PL9**

During the focus group interviews, these experiences were articulated with a mixture of frustration and resignation, revealing how institutional barriers gradually undermine trust and discourage further contact with the system:

"My child cannot wait, even if the system tells me to wait." **FUKR3**

Cultural barriers within Roma communities were also raised, though often with a great deal of nuance and ambivalence. Participants described expectations regarding gender roles, behavior, and appearance that could limit their voice and choices, especially for younger women. These limitations were rarely presented as explicit prohibitions; more often, they were experienced as internalized norms learned from an early age:

"I feel that as a young woman I have less of a voice than men or older women. That's how I was raised." **FPL1**

At the same time, women emphasized that cultural norms are neither homogeneous nor immutable and fixed, and that different people in the community have different attitudes towards education, for example:

“Some Roma think that if these young people, these children, stay at home and lead this kind of life, it will be good for them, to protect them, and they don’t see that it’s not really good for them. But the other half of the Roma are different. (...) So Roma are very divided. I think this is also due to mixed marriages, or simply the different attitudes of different people, that some simply want to get closer, while others do not.” **PL3**

Several participants rejected the belief that pursuing education, work, or public activity must mean rejecting Romanipen. They described their choices as cautious reinterpretations rather than breaks from tradition.

Economic insecurity emerged as a cross-cutting barrier, intensifying all other constraints. Poverty was described not only as a lack of income, but also as a lack of predictability, long-term planning, and real freedom of choice.

The collected accounts show that the barriers experienced by young Roma women are intersectional in nature and are shaped by the interaction of gender, ethnicity, migration status, and socioeconomic position. Overcoming them requires responses that go beyond interventions focused on a single dimension of the problem.

2.5. Spaces of freedom and agency

Despite the limitations described above, all participants pointed to the existence of spaces where they experienced a sense of freedom, authorship of their own actions, and agency. These spaces were diverse and often embedded in everyday life, including family relationships, artistic practices, education, digital platforms, and care work.

For some participants, creative expression, particularly music, dance, and performance, was a key space for autonomy and voice. Artistic spaces were described as environments relatively free from supervision and judgment, where women could express their emotions, tell their own stories, and build visibility on their own terms:

“When I’m on the stage, my voice matters. Not just because I’m singing, but because I’m telling a story.” **FPL4**

Similarly, dance was described as a form of embodied freedom, allowing participants to experience their own bodies without constant self-control:

“When I dance, I don’t think about what is allowed and what is not allowed. I just feel myself.” **PL3**

For women involved in education or professional development, agency was often linked to the learning process itself, rather than to immediate results. Acquiring new skills, completing courses, and even imagining alternative career paths were described as ways of regaining control over time and the future:

“When I learn something new, I feel like I’m taking control of my life.” **FPL5**

Some of the respondents who are engaged in activism on a daily basis also saw great value in their work to bring Roma and non-Roma closer together, using their education and functioning in two worlds at the same time:

„People don’t really know Roma and our customs either. I think one just have to show that not everything is the same, that not everyone is the same and behaves the same way. I try to do that. Roma women are increasingly coming forward and this is changing more and more. It is not the same as it was years ago. Now we go to school and fulfill our dreams.” **PL3**

In the contexts of migration and forced displacement, spaces of freedom were significantly narrowed, but not completely absent. For women living in collective accommodation centers, agency was

most often realized through caregiving, providing food, navigating the institutional system, and protecting the well-being of children. These activities, although often invisible, were perceived by the participants as moral achievements and sources of dignity:

“My strength is my children. Everything I do,
I do for them.” **FUKR1**

Digital platforms emerged as ambivalent but important spaces for agency. On the one hand, online visibility exposed women to criticism and hate speech; on the other, it enabled them to establish contacts, gain recognition, and circulate counter-narratives. Several participants described social media as the first space where their voices reached beyond their immediate surroundings:

“For the first time, someone outside my circle
was really listening to me.” **FPL5**

Overall, the agency of young Roma women appears to be situational, relational, and often silent. Rather than fitting into dominant models of empowerment focused on visibility or formal leadership, it manifests itself through perseverance, care, creativity, and everyday decision-making.

2.6. Voice, solidarity, and new forms of sisterhood

Throughout the process of analyzing collected research material, women’s solidarity emerged as one of the most important themes. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of spaces where women can speak freely, share experiences, and support each other without fear of judgment:

“I dream of a place where women can just be
together, drink tea, talk, laugh, and not have
to pretend about anything.” **FPL5**

Participant observation revealed that the research meetings themselves often became such spaces. During the focus group interviews, the women comforted each other, exchanged advice, and reflected

together on shared challenges. What began as a study often turned into moments of mutual recognition and care:

“When I listen to other women’s stories, I see myself in them and know that I am not alone.”

FPL3

A closer analysis of the interviews shows that voice and solidarity are deeply intertwined. Many women indicated that they speak most openly in environments where others understand the unspoken norms and realities of life, which reduces the need to constantly explain or defend their position:

“I feel support from people who know what it means to live as Romani women. With them, I don’t have to explain myself.” FPL2

In institutional contexts, the lack of such recognition often led to silence rather than confrontation:

“Maybe someone is talking to us, but maybe no one is really listening.” PL2

Solidarity was described not only as emotional support, but also as practical action: sharing information, helping with childcare, accompanying each other in dealings with authorities, or simply being present in times of crisis:

“We need more solidarity among ourselves as well. We have to support each other.” FUKR3

Some participants formulated a vision of sisterhood that transcended age hierarchies and traditional divisions. Younger women spoke of drawing strength from peer relationships rather than relying solely on the recognition of elders or authority figures:

“When women stand together, they can really move mountains.” PL2

At the same time, women were aware of the risks associated with visibility and collective voice, such as gossip, judgment, or negative consequences within the community. As a result, the emerging forms of sisterhood were often described as informal, semi-private, and carefully negotiated.

Importantly, solidarity was not presented as an opposition to men or family structures. Rather, it was understood as a complementary space of support and strengthening women's capacity to act within their own communities.

"I want Roma women to be one united force.
No one will support us if we don't support
one another" **UKR2**

The collected narratives show that the voice and solidarity of young Roma women are in the process of being reformulated. From everyday acts of care, through shared reflection, to digital connections, women are creating new relational spaces where speaking out becomes possible and collective strength can be developed.

3. Summary and key conclusions

The results of this study provide a multidimensional picture of the situation of young Roma women living in Poland today. Rather than forming a homogeneous category, the study participants constitute a generation marked by diverse experiences, social positions, and aspirations, shaped by the coexistence of factors such as gender, age, migration status, socioeconomic conditions, and access to supportive environments.

One of the key findings of the study is that Roma identity among young women is experienced and negotiated, rather than solely inherited or static. The participants described shaping identity as a dynamic process that is realized in everyday interactions, relationships, and decisions. Being Roma is associated with pride and a sense of belonging, but also with constant negotiation between the expectations of the community and the demands of the majority society. However, this negotiation was not experienced solely as a conflict; for many women, it became a source of reflection, creativity, and resilience.

The study also reveals a clear generational shift in the way femininity is understood and practiced. While older models of Romani femininity often emphasized endurance, silence, and conformity, young Romani women increasingly emphasize the importance of voice, choice, and self-determination. Importantly, this change does not mean a rejection of tradition. Rather, tradition is reinterpreted as a living cultural framework that allows for pluralism and adaptation over time.

Another important conclusion concerns aspirations and orientations towards the future. Contrary to deficit narratives, young Roma women formulate concrete, realistic visions of the future. Their dreams are relational rather than individualistic, often focusing on family well-being, stability, dignity, and meaningful participation in social life. For women affected by migration and forced displacement, thinking about the future is often limited by current existential needs, leading to the postponement, but not abandonment, of aspirations.

The study also shows that the barriers faced by young Roma women are multi-layered and cumulative. Discrimination, economic insecurity,

institutional indifference, and internalized gender norms interact with each other, shaping everyday limitations. These barriers are rarely experienced as isolated events; rather, they accumulate over time, leading to emotional exhaustion and limiting opportunities for long-term planning.

At the same time, the study's findings reveal numerous forms of agency that function outside the dominant models of empowerment. The agency of young Roma women is primarily relational and situational in nature, realized through caregiving, learning, creative practices, spirituality, and everyday perseverance. Artistic activities and digital spaces prove to be particularly important spaces for voice and self-representation, especially where institutional recognition is limited.

Finally, the study identifies women's solidarity as a key and already existing social resource. Young Romani women actively seek and create spaces for mutual support, recognition, and collective reflection. Emerging forms of sisterhood, though often informal and semi-private networks, serve as a protective function against isolation and internalized stigma and have significant transformative potential for Romani communities.

Overall, these findings challenge simplified narratives about Roma women and point to the need for analytical and policy frameworks that recognize complexity, pluralism, and relational forms of agency as key elements of contemporary Romani realities.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based directly on the research conducted and are aimed at providing adequate support to Roma women in Poland and raising awareness of the perspectives of young Roma women among policy makers, cultural institutions, and practitioners working at the European, national, and local levels. They are strategic in nature, avoid infantilization, and focus on creating conditions conducive to empowerment rather than imposing ready-made solutions.

4.1. Structural recommendations

Recognizing young Roma women as agents of social change rather than passive beneficiaries

Policies and programs should move away from deficit approaches that view Roma women primarily through the prism of their vulnerability to exclusion. Young Roma women are already exercising agency in various forms; effective strategies should strengthen existing resources rather than attempting to “activate” them from the outside.

Treating material insecurity as a fundamental issue

Access to stable housing, healthcare, childcare, and transparent administrative pathways is a prerequisite for participation in education, work, and civic life. Without addressing these fundamental issues, empowerment initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than truly effective.

4.2. Policy and institutional recommendations

Implementing an intersectional perspective as an operational tool

The experiences of young Roma women are shaped by the interaction of gender, ethnicity, age, migration status, and socioeconomic position. Policies that address only one of these dimensions may unknowingly reinforce exclusion. Intersectionality should guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs.

Strengthening institutional responsiveness and building trust

Public institutions should prioritize clear communication, timeliness, and a relational approach in their work with Roma women. Bureaucratic indifference and protracted procedures foster withdrawal and loss of trust, even in the absence of overt discrimination.

Including Roma women as co-creators of policies and knowledge

Consultations alone are not enough. Young Roma women should be genuinely involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies, research, and cultural initiatives that affect them.

4.3. Cultural and educational recommendations

Supporting women's informal and grassroots spaces

Artistic practices, peer networks, and community gatherings play a key role as spaces for empowerment, education, and leadership. They require flexible funding, long-term support, and trust, rather than rigid project frameworks.

Recognizing the pluralism of empowerment pathways

Empowerment should not be defined solely through the prism of formal education, employment, or public visibility. For many young Roma women, agency is realized through care, spirituality, creativity, and community responsibility. Recognizing this diversity increases the adequacy and effectiveness of policies.

Treating culture and art as political and educational resources

Artistic practices should be seen as legitimate forms of leadership, narrative, and social intervention, rather than as complementary or “soft” activities.

A few words in conclusion

This report shows that listening to the voices of young Roma women is not merely a methodological choice, but a political and ethical imperative. When given space, trust, and genuine attention, young Roma women articulate complex, forward-looking visions of identity, belonging, and social change.

Their narratives challenge the binary frameworks that still dominate public discourse: traditional versus modern, oppressed versus emancipated, included versus excluded. Instead, young Roma women operate in hybrid positions, combining continuity and transformation, care and autonomy, resilience and aspiration.

For European policymakers, supporting young Roma women should not be a marginal issue. It is a strategic investment in inclusive societies, shaped by people who have been talked about for decades but rarely listened to. The voices presented in this report remind us that real change does not begin with declarations or programs, but with relationships based on respect, recognition, and shared responsibility.

Biographical notes

Dr. Joanna Talewicz – anthropologist, expert in Roma studies, social inclusion, and minority rights. Co-founder and president of the Fundacja W Stronę Dialogu (Foundation Towards Dialogue). For years, she has been actively engaged in advocating for the rights of Roma men and women, participating in national and international projects aimed at combating discrimination and supporting the education of marginalized groups. She is a graduate of the Leadership Academy for Poland and a recipient of prestigious fellowships, including the Fulbright Program and Columbia University. She serves as a member of the Museum Council at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, as well as a representative of the Polish delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Additionally, she is a member of the Democracy and Belonging Forum at the Othering & Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley, and the International Council of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM). In 2024, she was selected for the prestigious Obama Foundation Leaders Europe program, joining a distinguished group of social leaders and innovators from across the continent. She is the author of numerous publications, a speaker, and a committed advocate for human rights.

Dr. Małgorzata Kołaczek – political scientist; former assistant professor (2012-2024) and former Deputy Director of the Institute for Didactics (2019-2023) at Intercultural Studies Institute, Jagiellonian University. Co-founder and vice-president of the Foundation for Dialogue. Co-founder of the Roma Community Center in Warsaw. Review editor at the journal Romani Studies of the Gypsy Lore Society. Graduate of Public Relations at the WSE in Krakow and the Academy of Professional Coach at the SGH in Warsaw. In her research and teaching, she deals with ethnic issues, especially the Roma community and their situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Educator, anti-discrimination trainer, coordinator of educational and research projects, creator of educational programs and tools. Scholarship holder of the European Commission and the US Department of State as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program. Visiting Professor at

the University of Rochester in the USA (2017), she also gave guest lectures at the University of British Columbia in Canada and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the USA.

Amadea Noemi Łakatosz – education and culture Specialist at the Foundation Towards Dialogue (Fundacja W Stronę Dialogu). A recipient of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (MSWiA) scholarship, Amadea is a versatile artist, book illustrator, and muralist. She was formally honored by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage for her artistic achievements and her dedication to promoting Roma culture. With a strong background in international youth work, she holds the Youthpass Certificate for her contributions to projects in Romania, Erasmus+ Youth, and the European Solidarity Corps. Amadea's experience includes organizing interactive Roma history workshops for high school students at ERIAC conferences. As a promoter of multicultural integration and a youth animator, she has collaborated with numerous organizations, including Harangos, Bahtale Roma, Ars Bonitas, Jaw Dikh (alongside Małgorzata Mirga-Tas), Nomada, and the Roma Advisory and Information Center. In her current role, she bridges the gap between educational and communication sectors, supporting Roma refugees from Ukraine and migrant communities. Her mission is to empower the Roma community through integration and education, building a vital "bridge of trust" between diverse cultures.

Cecylia Jakubczak – sociologist, communications director at the Foundation Towards Dialogue, expert in equality and advocacy communication. Author of nationwide social campaigns on minority groups. She conducts workshops for the media and business on inclusive communication. As a consultant, she supports NGOs in the field of communication strategy and crisis communication. She is active in the media as an expert and author of press articles. Cecylia is also the co-producer of the documentary film "7-My Sierpnia", which has won numerous awards at film festivals. She was recognised by "Wysokie Obcasy" in its ranking of 50 Bold Women and by Vogue Polska, which included her in its list of 41 inspiring personalities from the world of culture, science and activism.

Olena Vaidalovych – human rights lawyer and Safeguarding and PSEA expert. Senior Advisor on Legal Affairs and Advocacy at the Foundation Towards Dialogue. She represents Romani community from Ukraine, defending the rights of vulnerable groups and supports Ukrainian Romani refugees find safety in Poland, as well as being integrated into society. She was a Fellow of the OHCHR Minority Fellowship Programme in 2018. Additionally, her career path has been enriched by joining the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and approaching the needs of Roma people from 57 Participating States to OSCE/ODIHR. She was also a part of UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, providing her expertise on minority issues and human rights. She was the first Roma woman in Poland on the cover of a Polish magazine – “Wysokie Obcasy”. She was nominated to Wysokie Obcasy Superheroine Award in 2024. Ambassador of the Foundation Towards Dialogue’s viral educational campaigns: “Zapisz dziecko do szkoły” and “Rozjeżdżamy stereotypy”.