



## ● **REGARD - REMEMBERING GENOCIDE AGAINST ROMA DISCRIMINATION**

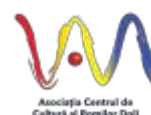
The current report is part of the REGARD project and of the participatory processes foreseen within the project.

The report is composed of three parts: a brief overview of the project included in chapter 1; the description of the methodological approach included in chapter 2; and the results of the interviews with local and regional stakeholders conducted in Zagreb between the 10th and the 20th of July 2023.

<b>1 Introduction to the REGARD project.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 Methodological approach .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Findings of the interviews .....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Situation of Roma communities in Croatia .....	6
3.2 Knowledge of the Roma genocide.....	13
3.3 Effectiveness of the measures implemented and suggestions for improvement.....	13
3.4 Suggestions for the FSC .....	15
3.5 Actors to be invited to the conference.....	15

**Anexx 1** Invitation to the interviews  
    Consent form (example)  
    Questionnaire

**Anexx 2** Consent forms (signed)



## **1 Introduction to the REGARD project**

REGARD is a European project funded by the CERV Programme, dedicated to the remembrance of Samudaripen and the fight against Roma discrimination. The project takes place in three countries (Croatia, Italy and Romania) between February 2023 and April 2024.

The coordinator of the project is the Italian National Centre of Research (CNR-IRPPS) and the local partners of the three countries are: **Croatian Romani Union "Kali Sara"** (Croatia); **Associazione Thèm Romano Onlus** (Italy); and **Asociația Centrul de Cultura al Romilor Dolj** (Romania).

Following the anniversaries of the Roma calendar, REGARD aims at preserving and transmitting the memory of Roma genocide and resistance by considering its root causes and consequences, and the implications for today. As an integrated action model, the project plans to implement in Croatia, Romania and Italy a set of activities:

1. Surveys on the knowledge of Roma genocide and Roma culture and on anti-gypsyism;
2. Training modules for schools on Roma genocide, Roma resistance and Roma history and culture for students and teachers supporting the remembrance of Samudaripen in textbooks;
3. **Participatory processes with institutions and civil society to foster a common culture of remembrance and mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma, men and women, and develop shared intervention strategies for fighting anti gypsyism;**
4. Cultural Events and on the artistic expressions of Roma created during and after Samudaripen, remembering the Holocaust including three international conferences attended by Romani scholars of Roma culture scholars to sustain the EU goal of integrating the historical narrative of the Roma into the national and European one for both target groups, but open to the public.

The interviews focused on the following issues:

1. Situation of Roma communities in Croatia
2. Knowledge of the genocide to which Roma communities were subject to in Croatia among Roma communities and the wider society and its impact social rights
3. Effectiveness of the measures implemented and suggestions for improvement
4. Ways of making the Future Search Conference useful for the community
5. Actors to be invited to the conference

## **2 Methodological approach**

The participatory process foresees two phases:

- The conduction of an initial desk review and subsequent individual and anonymous semi-structured interviews with local strategic stakeholders representing a wide and diversified range of points of view and resources on the topic of the project. The results will be used to design a participatory event, which will take place in the second phase of the process, capable of responding to local needs and expectations.
- The realisation of a participatory event, which will adopt the Future Search Conference (FSC) method, which is a planning tool aimed at involving the main players of a territory in the construction of a shared vision of change. This event will take place on the 8th of September and will involve circa 50 representatives of the civil society, academia, and institutions. Further detail about the event will be provided later.

As previously mentioned, the current report focuses on the first phase of the participatory process.

The interviews foreseen by this phase have been conducted both online and offline. In this phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This means that they followed a common track of questions, but at the same time they were flexible enough to welcome any spontaneous input that the interviewees deemed relevant to share.

Overall, 26 interviews have been conducted between the 10th and the 20th of July 2023:

- **Anonymous interviewee, Roma National Minority Council of the City of Zagreb**  
The Roma National Minority Council represents 2,167 members of the Roma national minority in the City of Zagreb, according to the 2021 census.
- **Gordan Bosanac, City Coordination for Human Rights**  
Special committee of the City Assembly of the City of Zagreb, dealing with human rights.
- **Anonymous interviewee, Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia**  
The Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia is a commissioner of the Croatian Parliament responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, combating discrimination and preventing torture.
- **Anonymous interviewee, KALI SARA Media Centre, independent journalist**  
KALI SARA Media Centre incorporates an official gazette of the Roma national minority in Croatia, an eponymous web portal and an online radio station.
- **Danijel Vojak, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, senior research associate**  
The leading Croatian historian on the question of genocide against Roma in the Second World War in the Independent State of Croatia.
- **Ivo Goldstein, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, History Department**  
One of the leading Croatian historians on the issues of holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia.
- **Nenad Jovanović, Novosti, independent journalist**  
Official weekly magazine of the Serb National Council, an organisation promoting Serb culture and identity, focused on fighting for civil rights, human rights, and national rights of the Serb community in Croatia.
- **Anonymous interviewee, Croatian Romani Union "KALI SARA"**  
The most numerous and important Romani NGO in Croatia with its representatives in all counties with Roma inhabitants. Official partner of the Croatian Government in implementing the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma.
- **Anonymous interviewee, The Centre for Promotion of Tolerance and Holocaust Remembrance**  
The Centre's mission is to develop a platform that influences the development of a more tolerant and humane social environment, nurturing the values of inclusion, humanism, accessibility and diversity.
- **Anonymous interviewee, Office of Ombudsperson for Gender Equality**  
The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality acts in an independent manner, monitors the enforcement of the Gender Equality Act and other regulations on gender equality as well as

investigating cases of infringement of the principle of gender equality, cases of discrimination against individuals or groups.

- **Aleksandar Racz, University of Applied Health Sciences, vice dean**  
The university has special quotas for students of Roma national minority since 2019 when the decision on the direct enrolment of members of the Roma national minority in all study programs were put into action, provided that they meet the minimum criteria and pass the state graduation exam.
- **Anonymous interviewee, Central Roma Library**  
Represents one of eleven libraries of national minorities in Croatia. Systematically collect sources on the basis of which we will learn about the tradition and uniqueness of the Roma people, but also about their connection and the traces they left on the path of their travels.
- **Veljko Kajtazi, Member of Parliament**  
Representative of the twelve national minorities in the Croatian Parliament, Roma national minority included. Fourth consecutive term.
- **Anonymous interviewee, Ministry of Science and Education, Administration for National Minorities**  
Finances and supervises educational programs of national minorities.
- **Marin Korman, Anti-Fascist Alliance**  
Independent, non-governmental, non-partisan, anti-fascist and democratic, multinational organisation of citizens with aim of gathering of participants of the National Liberation Struggle and anti-fascist citizens
- **Dario Jurišić, Office of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities**  
The Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities is an independent state institution whose purpose is to protect, monitor and promote the rights and interests of persons with disabilities.
- **Anonymous interviewee, City Office for Culture, International Relations and Civil Society, Department for National Minorities**
- **Anonymous interviewee, historian - independent researcher**
- **Anonymous interviewee, independent journalist**
- **Filip Škiljan, Institute for Migrations and Ethnic Studies, research associate**  
The Institute conducts activities, such as interdisciplinary research, communication of science, lectures, organisation of conferences, consultations that contribute to the

accumulation of knowledge about sociopolitical conditions and consequences of migration, ethnic development, ethnic relations, different forms of identity, etc.

- **Anonymous interviewee, independent journalist**
- **Suzana Krčmar, Croatian Romani Union “KALI SARA”, president**
- **Anonymous interviewee, member of the Međimurje County Assembly**  
Međimurje County has the highest number of inhabitants of Roma nationality and several large Roma settlements are located within its administrative borders.
- **Helena Pirnat Dragičević, Children’s Attorney**  
The institution of the Ombudsman for Children was established in 2003 as the first specialised institution of its kind in the Republic of Croatia, with the aim of protecting and promoting the rights and interests of children.
- **Alen Tahiri, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia, managing director**  
Improvement of the entire system of protection and promotion of human rights and the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia, especially those areas that require priority resolution of existing problems.
- **Goran Lapat, Faculty of education, University of Zagreb - Department in Čakovec, Head of Pedagogy**  
Offer undergraduate programmes for educating primary school and preschool teachers, programmes of postgraduate specialisation and doctoral programmes in the area of educational sciences

The main findings of the interviews are detailed in the next chapter.

### 3 Findings of the interviews

#### 3.1 Situation of Roma communities in Croatia

According to the 2021 population census, 17,980 members of the Roma national minority live in Croatia today, and they are one of the 22 recognized national minorities.<sup>1</sup> Roma have their representative in the national parliament and their representatives in regional and local self-government bodies. Most Roma live in Međimurje, Osijek-Baranja, and Sisak-Moslavina Counties, and the City of Zagreb. According to unofficial data obtained by the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, approximately 30,000 to 40,000 Roma live currently in Croatia, which means that a large number of them do not declare themselves as Roma.<sup>2</sup> There are nine different groups of Roma in Croatia who differ from each other according to their transcultural and transnational identity and according to language, religion, and way of life.<sup>3</sup>

During the process of abolishing slavery in the Danube Principalities in the 19th century, a migration wave of Roma moved from present-day Romania to northern and eastern Croatia (mostly the Međimurje region). These Roma belonged to the Koritari group and spoke a dialect of the Romanian language. Today, that language is called *ljimba d'bajaš*, and its speakers are called the Boyash, the most numerous Roma group in Croatia.<sup>4</sup> They mostly live in separate, segregated settlements.

Roma are the only national minority in Croatia that have their own national action plan that has been passed down by the Croatian Government ([National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021 – 2027](#)).<sup>5</sup> It represents a series of measures implemented with the aim of speeding up the inclusion of Roma in Croatian society and improving their living conditions.

When it comes to the situation of Roma communities, the following difficulties have been pointed out during the interviews.

##### i. Risk of poverty and extreme poverty

Due to multiple factors, such as low levels of education, spatial segregation, limited access to the labour market, traditional roles demanded by their community (all discussed below), etc. many Roma and their families are at the constant risk of poverty or extreme poverty. Many interviewees mentioned poverty or extreme poverty as one of the major problems affecting Roma communities in Croatia, paradoxically identifying it as a root source of above-mentioned conditions, thus confirming that poverty indeed creates a vicious circle from which Roma can hardly escape alone.

The UN Assembly discussed "poverty" in 2021 stating that it restricts access to education, housing, employment, and social services to those who need them most. The Assembly defined poverty as a negative stereotype and an obstacle to the exercise of rights, pointing out that poor people are discriminated against in many ways. The Roma community is part of that group and official statistics confirm this. A base data analysis showed that almost the

---

<sup>1</sup> Croatian Bureau of Statistics: *The Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Croatia*; <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270>

<sup>2</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia: *National Program for Roma*

<sup>3</sup> Ratz, A.: Romi u Hrvatskoj kroz povijest – od nepoznavanja i stereotipizacije do prihvaćanja i integracije. *Journal of applied health sciences* (2022); 8(2): 281-299

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission: *National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021 -2027*;

[https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ukljucivanje-roma\\_publicacija\\_web\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ukljucivanje-roma_publicacija_web_en.pdf)

entire Roma population in Croatia (93 percent) has an income below the national poverty threshold, more than half of household members (62 percent) are unemployed, while the share of work paid in Croatia is the lowest among EU member states.<sup>6</sup>

## **ii. Discrimination by general population**

All interviewees agree that Roma are discriminated against by the majority population in Croatia (and elsewhere), while several noted that Roma represent the most discriminated group, a situation confirmed by several different surveys. A 2022 survey was mentioned by two interviewees that shows that more than 50 % of the general population have negative prejudices against Roma. They believe that reasons for this are partially historical, because Roma have always been identified as “different” and as “newcomers” (a negative image of Roma communities portrayed through history), although they inhabit the area for more than seven centuries. The fact that Croatian society is pretty closed and conservative only exacerbates this.

Many interviewees believe that the discrimination stems from the lack of knowledge about Roma or not understanding their way of life. The contact between the general population and traditionally closed Roma communities has always been limited, so most people rely on “popular” prejudices when forming their opinion on Roma. The prejudices in turn lead to discrimination against Roma in general. An interesting point was given by one of the interviewees who believes that majority population in Croatia does not perceive Roma as a national minority in the same way as i.e. Italians or Hungarians but as a “problem that needs to be fixed”.

Although a lot has been done to popularise Roma culture, language and heritage in the last two decades the discrimination is on the rise in some areas, especially those parts of Croatia where Roma live in larger numbers (Međimurje county). It is not uncommon for shops, bars, clubs and similar places to display signs that they “do not serve Gypsies”. In those areas the access to public services, like libraries, theatres, cinemas is also limited to Roma.

Many interviewees agree that institutional discrimination is nearly non-existent, especially on the state and governmental level, and that any serious anti-Roma sentiments would lead to the end of a career or losing a job. Instances of institutional discrimination still exist on local level and in smaller towns but those are isolated cases that usually just reflect personal opinions of administrative staff. Some interviewees voiced their fears that any current sympathies towards Roma represent only a political strategy and that Croatian politics is only liberal at its surface.

Another area where institutional discrimination still exists is the educational system. An interviewee from the Međimurje county mentioned that it’s the institutions that allow non-Roma parents to enrol their children in other schools, rather than ones they should (based on the geographical criterion), whereas Roma families are not allowed to do the same. The problem of segregated schools and lower educational performance in some of them is discussed below in detail.

## **iii. Discrimination by the media**

Several interviewees analysed a role played by the media in creating a general picture about Roma, contributing to their discrimination by majority population. Until recently, the media

---

<sup>6</sup> Kunac, S., Klasnić, K., Lalić, S.: Roma Inclusion in the Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study (Zagreb, 2018)

tended to over dramatize events focused around Roma, whether good or bad. If a member of the Roma community conducted a felony, their nationality would for sure be mentioned, indirectly pointing that the kind of deviant behaviour is connected with the perpetrator's ethnicity (Serbian national minority faced the same problem). On the other hand, examples of positive discrimination towards Roma were applauded more than necessary, creating a belief among the general population that Roma were somehow more privileged than other members of the society. All this contributed to creating a distorted image of the Roma in the media.

Although a lot has changed in the recent years, the positive stories centred on Roma are still extremely rare, only lately on the rise, mainly because this kind of reporting is financed or supported by the EU funds or relevant Ministries.

#### **iv. Segregation**

There are more than sixty Roma settlements in Croatia, most of them located in the northern parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> In some areas, as many as 46 percent of Roma live in spatially isolated and segregated settlements, where living conditions are extremely poor.<sup>8</sup> Almost all interviewees agree that spatial segregation of Roma, especially those who live in settlements, represents a serious obstacle to their full inclusion in the Croatian society. Apart from being isolated, Roma settlements are characterised by poor housing conditions, inadequate clean water supplies and sewage systems, inadequate infrastructure, occasional lack of electricity and the almost complete absence of any kind of public or recreational facilities. Roma who live in settlements have limited access to health care services, education, public institutions, and the like. The problem of educational segregation is additionally stressed since one-fifth of Roma children in Croatia are educated in completely ethnically segregated classes (discussed below).

The Croatian government or local administration have not yet tackled this problem in a satisfying manner. Although a national program for the inclusion of Roma exists and has been implemented by several consecutive governments it does not offer a systematic approach to the problem of segregated settlements. Several reasons were mentioned, i.e. some of these settlements are decades old, as well as the fact that many Roma wish to leave the settlements but are unable to, while those who succeed are rarely willing to come back and help their own community. A few interviewees fear that the strategic documents for Roma inclusion are "mere ink on paper" and are not put into action or implemented accordingly.

Some interviewees believe that in some cases Roma build their own ghettos, closing themselves from the rest of society more or less willingly. Several settlements are controlled by powerful members of the Roma community ("local sheriffs") who establish their own set of rules and followers, deciding on a whole range of mundane questions, like who will be given job if an opportunity arises, who is going to apply for the social welfare, whose house will be connected to a power grid, etc. Those individuals in many cases represent legally elected representatives of the community in question.

---

<sup>7</sup> Croatian Romani Union "KALI SARA", internal database.

<sup>8</sup> Grubišić, M.: Siromaštvo je diskriminacija. *Phralipen*, br. 26(6)  
*Annual Ombudsman Report for 2021*



However there have been many attempts in the last decade to improve the living conditions in the settlements by providing them with electricity, water supply systems, gas installations, access roads, public spaces like community homes, playgrounds, etc.

**v. Poor level of education and education in segregated schools**

As a main cause of prevalent poverty amongst members of the Roma community almost all interviewees pointed out low levels of education. While elementary school is mandatory in Croatia, many Roma do not finish high school education, which is still not obligatory, or do not enrol into high school at all, despite the fact that the government offers scholarships to every Roma student who successfully finished the school year. Only a few dozen Roma students attend Croatian universities or similar educational institutions, and those who do tend to study at only a few universities that have special enrolment rules for Roma (positive discrimination).

There are several crucial factors at play here. Several interviewees pointed out that “it is hard to study on an empty stomach”, stressing their belief that many Roma families are more preoccupied with ensuring their children’s access to food rather than to education, pushing them to work rather than to study, as a simple survival strategy. Seen from this perspective, poverty and low levels of education become inseparably linked, one causing the other, and vice versa.

Some of the interviewees underlined that traditional values are more important in the Roma communities than education. Low level of education among family members results in the limited understanding of the benefits of the education, discouraging younger generations to stay in school or finish any form of higher education. An interesting example was mentioned by a history professor aware of the cases where Roma boys finish elementary school only to be able to apply for the driver’s licence later.

Especially vulnerable are Roma girls whose lives are more shaped by the traditional values of their communities who expect them to be obedient daughters and wives (more on the topic later). On the other hand, those Roma who decide to complete their education instead of going to work and marrying young may face discrimination within the community. The lack of adequate support services (counselling, psychological support, etc.) for Roma students may result in Roma students’ leaving universities or not undertaking tertiary education at all.

Segregated elementary schools and low performance of the Roma students represent an important issue. Segregation is mostly explained as a consequence of the high territorial concentration of Roma in some counties and municipalities, especially in Međimurje County, where we encounter exclusively Roma classes (and probably exclusively Roma schools in the near future). Most of these elementary schools are also spatially segregated, meaning that they are located inside Roma settlements or very near them. Even when not attached to a particular settlement, non-Roma parents tend to pull their children out of these schools. Many of the interviewees agree on the fact that these schools often have a low level of educational performance when compared to other elementary schools, explaining that for schools that have a high percentage of Roma students achieving a high level of educational performance is very difficult as the level of prior knowledge of children in these schools is often lower than that of children in other schools. This poor level of knowledge is in many cases accompanied by a poor knowledge of Croatian language, because for many students Croatian is not the language used in their families or neighbourhoods. Although a special

two-year preschool program for Roma children exists and has been designed to help children overcome the described difficulties, many childcare facilities and preschools do not have enough staff or space to put it into action. Cases where Roma children start elementary school with no knowledge of Croatian language are not uncommon at all.

Some of the interviewees offered a potential solution to the problem of segregated schools. The local administration, as well as the relevant Ministry should make sure that segregated schools get extra funding for extracurricular activities and better equipment. In that way, those schools would become more attractive to the general population, who would not feel forced to drive their children to more distanced schools that offer better educational possibilities. Another solution is to prepare future teachers to work with Roma children to help them breach the knowledge gap, instead of widening it during schooling.

Some interviewees mentioned the cases of discrimination in schools by teachers and other children. While all interviewees underline that Roma children/youth may face discrimination during their educational path, not all of them agree on the intensity level of discrimination faced by Roma students in schools. Some of them consider that Roma students are subject to discrimination by both teachers and non-Roma students, other interviewees underline that the level of discrimination is much lower than in the past and it does not exist in all schools. According to the former, teachers discriminate against Roma people by not offering them the same attention and chances as the other children or by making them feel less important than non-Roma children. But generally speaking, discrimination has decreased a lot consequently to a series of projects/initiatives implemented in schools to foster tolerance and respect for diversity, including Roma culture, and to fight discrimination and bullying. Furthermore, discrimination occurs more often in primary and secondary education than in upper and tertiary education. This may be also due to the fact that the number of Roma students in upper and tertiary education is still rather limited.

Only a few Croatian universities apply a positive discrimination policy regarding Roma students so some interviewees believe that Roma have limited access to certain faculties. In order to promote the access of Roma people to universities, the Croatian government should implement a positive discrimination policy, reserving specific places in public universities for Roma students, regardless of their school grades, making admission possible for those who passed the state graduation tests.

#### **vi. Employment difficulties**

All interviews agree on the fact that for Roma the limited access to the labour market is a crucial aspect, as lack of a legal and continuous income ensuring a decent living impacts negatively on their well-being and migration as well as on the access to education of their children. Limited access to the labour market is a consequence of the limited education level of Roma people as well as of the discrimination faced by Roma people in this area. This opinion has been substantiated by the 2022 survey revealing that one third of employees working in the service sector believe that Roma workers scare the customers. Older interviewees mentioned that Roma were entitled to employment in the former Yugoslavia, which was a multinational and multi-ethnic state, but the situation deteriorated drastically in the 90's.

## **vii. The multiple discrimination faced by Roma women (and especially Roma girls)**

When asked to identify particular groups within the Roma community which are at risk of being discriminated against on multiple accounts almost all interviewees singled out women. The Roma community is still largely traditional and structured patriarchally. Women are expected to occupy traditional roles of daughters, mothers and caregivers. Their employment rate is significantly lower when compared to male members of the community. They are also more vulnerable to acts of physical and emotional violence. As such, they are not just discriminated against by the majority population, but by their own communities.

Especially vulnerable group are Roma girls, thanks to the traditional preference for male offspring in the Roma communities. They drop out of school more frequently and earlier, usually completing only elementary education or even less and also tend to marry very young. The cases of child marriages in conservative Roma communities are not uncommon, because young Roma girls see marriage as a means of escape from poverty and restrictions of their own families.

Apart from marrying at an early age, Roma women tend to have several children, each born one after another. This partly stems from the fact that they are often unaware of their reproductive rights or available birth control methods.

Many interviewees believe that the only solution for improving the position of Romani women is their systematic education, as well as education of their families, especially its male members on women's rights and gender equality.

An interesting topic surfaced during the interviews, the treatment of Roma women in hospitals during their pregnancy and delivery. The interviewee working in the healthcare system stated that nowadays hospitals in large Croatian cities, especially in Zagreb, treat Roma women the same as other expectant mothers or women in labour, giving them the same amount of attention and care. But there were cases of discrimination in the past, although these were limited to verbal discrimination, not the actual lack of care.

## **viii. Access to health care and treatment of people with disabilities**

Many interviewees agree that for some Roma access to healthcare is limited, even basic healthcare services. This especially applies to those Roma living in segregated settlements, for whom even access to primary healthcare services, such as primary care physicians in the local health centres, represents a problem. Some Roma settlements are as big as small towns when it comes to number of inhabitants but not one of those has local health centres, or other communal facilities for that matter. When asked for their opinion on Roma being discriminated against by physicians and other hospital staff most of the interviewees could not give a definite answer, citing that they are not personally aware of such cases.

Some interviewees mentioned that members of the Roma community with disabilities represent a vulnerable group. They are mostly unaware of their rights and they are even less likely to have much contact with institutions. Roma with disabilities who live in settlements

very rarely ask for any kind of help, which they are entitled to under the Croatian law. Another problem is the lack of accessibility but this is a global issue in Croatia.

#### **ix. Cultural differences and animosity between different groups of Roma.**

As indicated above, there are two main groups of Roma living in Croatia today. Up to 80 % of Croatian Roma belong to Boyash Roma, who came from Romania in the middle of the 19th century and speak a variant of the Romanian language, called Boyash-Romanian (*ljimba d'bajaš*). The rest of Roma represent a heterogenous group linked together by the use of Romani Chib (official language of the Roma). The differences between these two groups are not just linguistic and many interviewees underline that they have different cultural practices and traditions. Many Romani Chib-speaking Roma are fully integrated in Croatian society and they tend to live in the capital or in the coastal towns of Istria and Primorje, while Boyash Roma live in the continental part of the country, often in segregated settlements.

Many interviewees, especially those coming from the Roma community themselves, pointed out that the level of mutual discrimination between two groups of Roma is quite high. Boyash Roma resent the linguistic and cultural dominance of the Romani Chib Roma, while they often complain that Boyash Roma are not real Roma after all.

Several interviewees mention the similarities in the perception of Roma and Serbian national minority, which also experienced a severe discrimination in the 90's, due to the war conflict with Serbia. Both groups present traditional national minorities in Croatia and in a way, Croatians always kept their distance. But many problems and difficulties that have been discussed earlier are unique for Roma.

An interesting topic emerged, the comparison with the situation of Roma communities and recent influx of immigrants to Croatia. Most of them are economic immigrants from Asia in search of work. The interviewed expert on migrations expressed his belief that in a short time many of the popular accusations directed towards Roma will be transferred to this new stratum in Croatian society. According to him, there is one important difference between these two groups. Roma try to integrate into Croatian society and be a part of it (Roma children attend Croatian schools, they have representatives in state and local institutions) while only the second or third generation of immigrants will try to do the same. Moreover, according to a representative of the Roma community living in Međimurje settlements, said that there is a good relationship between Roma and new migrants in Croatia.

#### **ix. Ethnic mimicry**

A large discrepancy exists between the number of Roma in the 2021 national census (17,980) and unofficial data obtained by the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (30,000 - 40,000). The same problem has been voiced by many interviewees who believe that many Roma are unwilling to declare their national identity. Even today Roma feel compelled to change their names to mask their ethnicity. Better educated Roma, those who left settlements and those who wish to be fully integrated are more prone to ethnic mimicry.

According to some of the interviewees, being ashamed of one's Roma identity is an obstacle to fighting against discrimination, as it risks perpetuating a negative image of the Roma community. Other interviewees consider that the feeling of shame is perfectly understood, considering the discrimination level to which Roma people have been and still are subject to.

### 3.2 Knowledge of the Roma genocide

Opinions on the knowledge level of the genocide to which Roma people have been subject to in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War differ significantly. Some of the actors point out that overall Croatian society is aware of the Roma genocide (Samudaripen) but that the exact extent of the extermination and its consequences are almost unknown (official numbers state that more than 90% of Roma perished in concentration camps run by Ustashes). Others sustain that there is limited knowledge of the genocide against Roma, as school and university history curricula in Croatia focus only on the holocaust against Jews and Serbs, putting Roma victims together with the rest of the victims (political opponents, communists, partisans, etc.). Moreover, some of the interviewees pointed out a recent trend in Croatian society of historical revisionism that rehabilitates the role of the Ustasha regime and denies holocaust in general.

Opinions among the interviewed actors about knowledge of the genocide within the Roma community are also divergent. Some of the interviewees consider that Roma are even less aware of the genocide committed against them in the Second World War than the general population, since mostly members of the general population are the ones who speak publicly about it. Others believe that Roma have been very much aware of what happened to them in the Independent State of Croatia but that they were unwilling to talk about it for a very long time, partly because they were afraid that something similar could happen again. Fortunately, a lot has been done in the last two decades to make Samudaripen known to Roma, as well as to non-Roma, i.e. the opening of the Roma Memorial Centre in Uštica, annual commemoration for the victims on August 2nd, direct broadcast of the event on national television, etc.

When it comes to the impact of knowledge about the genocide on present discrimination against Roma, opinions among the interviews again differ. Many believe that a better knowledge of one's history would improve Roma self-consciousness and recognition of one's identity. Some interviewees also believe that the general awareness of Samudaripen would lower the present levels of discrimination against Roma, because it would create a sense of empathy in the majority population (sympathising with the victims). The same is said about the knowledge of Roma culture in general. Others believe that better knowledge of Samudaripen would not have any impact on the image of Roma in Croatian society because the existing prejudices are too deeply rooted and the said events took place too far in the past.

### 3.3 Effectiveness of the measures implemented and suggestions for improvement

The continuity of public policy aimed at the inclusion of members of the Roma national minority in the Republic of Croatia has existed since 2003, when the Government adopted the National Roma Program. More recently the Croatian government has taken various measures to improve the living conditions of Roma people and to fight discrimination against them which have been implemented in two consecutive strategic documents, the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion for the 2013 to 2020 Period and National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021 – 2027. The main objective of the National

Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021 – 2027 is to significantly reduce the differences between the general population of the Republic of Croatia and the Roma in the Republic of Croatia, but also to reduce differences within the Roma population.<sup>9</sup>

Croatia's national strategy is based on long-standing experience of Roma inclusion issues under the national Roma programme. This includes the need for better vertical co-operation, as well as improved coordination between departments and stakeholders. The strategy addresses several key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing, citizenship rights, poverty and social welfare, as well as inclusion in social and cultural life.

The efforts invested so far to equalise the position of members of the Roma national minority have resulted in considerable progress. The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia recognizes the Roma as a national minority, the legislative framework provides them with representatives in the Croatian Parliament as well as at the regional and local government level. Also, Roma NGOs are organised noticeably better and participate in public and political life much more actively.<sup>10</sup>

Progress has also been made in other aspects of life in the Roma community, particularly education. Pre-school attendance rates as well as primary school attendance and completion rates among children belonging to the Roma national minority have significantly increased, and we are witnessing serious efforts to provide adequate support to as many children belonging to the Roma national minority as possible from an early age. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the higher levels of education.<sup>11</sup>

Some progress can be noticed in the field of employment and housing, but still – in most key areas of life no progress has been achieved that would equalise the living conditions of the Roma population with the rest of the Croatian population, especially of those Roma who live in segregated settlements.

Despite the various measures adopted by the Croatian authorities, all interviewees agree that they have not been fully effective. Nevertheless, some interviewees point out that the situation has improved considerably in the last two decades, especially since Roma have their representative in the Croatian Parliament.

As to measures that should be undertaken, almost all interviewees agree on the fact that positive examples of Roma people that succeeded in life are needed both within and outside the Roma communities. Furthermore, some interviewees underline that Roma communities should open themselves to the general population so that the others could know them better and should push more for promoting their culture and traditions as well as for claiming the respect of their social and human rights. However, not all interviewees agree with the fact that this should be done by Roma people themselves. Some of the interviewees point out that this should be the role of public institutions, considering their mission, and not of - or at least not only of - Roma associations and citizens. When it comes to public institutions, some interviews consider that Roma authorities should promote a higher participation of Roma people in public administrations both in decision-making positions and in lower level positions.

---

<sup>9</sup> European Commission: National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021 -2027;  
[https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ukljucivanje-roma\\_publicacija\\_web\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ukljucivanje-roma_publicacija_web_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In general, when it comes to positive discrimination, interviewees have divergent opinions about its effectiveness in improving the situation of Roma people. Some of them consider it useful, while others consider that it is discriminatory and that it risks further increasing discrimination rather than preventing it.

### 3.4 Suggestions for the FSC

Interviewees believe that the Future Search Conference can be useful for the Roma community, as well as the general population, as it could potentially contribute to the improvement of the level of knowledge on the history of Roma people and on the genocide against Roma in particular, but are not sure on concrete changes it could have in improving the overall status of the Roma communities in Croatia. They agree that the participatory approach used in FSC is a novelty and that it could produce interesting results, but that the actual impact of these kinds of events stays limited, simply because the number of participants is limited. It will certainly foster dialogue between Roma and non-Roma on specific actions to be taken for improving living conditions of Roma people, but the impact of actions is limited by the risk of relevant public authorities not participating in the event. On the other hand, including too many public representatives could jeopardise the spontaneous approach the FSC method promotes, and not give enough space for Roma participants to raise their concerns. Some of the Roma interviewees also underline that they do not expect the event to contribute to the improvement of their living condition, but rather to a better knowledge of their culture and history.

Interviewees also underline that the presence of the media and the overall visibility of the project play a crucial role in its effectiveness.

### 3.5. Actors to be invited to the conference

Interviewees pointed out the following actor categories to be invited to the event:

- Roma youth, especially Roma students and successful young Roma
- Roma from the settlements, victims of the discrimination
- Samudaripen survivors and members of their families
- High School teachers and university professors, not only those that teach history but religious teachers, sociology teachers, Croatian language teachers
- Elementary school teachers and preschool teachers dealing with Roma children
- Principals of schools attended by the Roma students
- State employees working with the civil sector (public administration)
- Members of the academic circles, independent researchers, especially those dealing with the Second World War, social scientists, anthropologists
- Youth networks
- NGOs dealing with the culture of remembrance (Documenta, Centar za mirovne studije)
- Roma NGOs
- NGOs dealing with human rights and national minority right
- LGBTQ NGOs

- Local/regional/state decision-making actors: Ministry of Culture and Media, Ministry of Science and education, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, various Ombudsman offices, Members of the Croatian Parliament, City of Zagreb and its relevant offices, Agency for Education
- Cultural and research institutions: Croatian History Museum, Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, National and University Library
- Mass-media (newspapers, radio, TV), national and regional, particularly those interested in human rights and national minorities
- Police force, those who come in contact with Roma community