



REGARD - REmembering Genocide Against Roma Discrimination

ELECTRONIC TOWN MEETING

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The present report is a deliverable of the participatory process conducted within the REGARD project.

The report is subdivided into three chapters:

1. the first chapter briefly describes the REGARD project;
2. the second chapter presents the objectives of the event in the framework of the participatory process foreseen by the project;
3. the third chapter discusses the results of the event.



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1. Background: the REGARD project

REGARD is a European project funded by the CERV Program and implemented by a partnership led by the Italian National Research Council CNR-IRPPS and composed of three Roma associations: Them Romanò (Italy), Croatian Romani Union “KALI SARA” (Croatia), Romirol Dolj (Romania). Following the anniversaries of the Roma calendar, REGARD aims to preserve and transmit the memory of the Roma genocide and resistance by considering its deep causes and consequences deep and the implications for the present.

The project has implemented in Croatia, Romania, and Italy a series of activities:

1. surveys on knowledge of Roma genocide and Roma culture and anti-Gypsyism;
2. training modules for schools on the genocide of Roma peoples, Roma resistance and Roma history and culture for students and teachers to support the remembrance of Samudaripen in textbooks;
3. participatory processes with institutions and civil society to foster a culture common memory and mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma, and develop shared intervention strategies to counter anti-Gypsyism;
4. cultural events on Roma artistic expressions created during and after Samudaripen, remembering the Holocaust, including three international conferences attended by scholars of Roma culture to support the EU's goal of integrate Roma historical narratives into national and European narratives.

2. The participatory process

The participatory process was overseen by Avventura Urbana Srl, a consulting firm with thirty years' experience in the management of inclusive decision-making processes and mediation of public conflicts. The activities were implemented in collaboration with local partners and under the coordination of the project's lead partner.

2.1. Activities carried out in 2023

In 2023, a series of participatory activities took place in each of the three partner countries, with the goal of involving citizens and local stakeholders in the analysis of local factors related to the project theme (the recognition of Samudaripen and the fight against discrimination of the Roma peoples) and in the development of a shared vision of change. The activities included, in each country:



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1. conducting semi-structured individual and anonymous interviews with approximately 25 local strategic stakeholders representing a wide and diverse pool of views and resources on the project theme, aimed at exploring the context;
2. the implementation of a participatory event targeting about 60 citizens and stakeholders, called upon to develop a shared action plan through the method of the Future Search Conference (FSC).

The selection of participants paid special attention to the creation of a group balanced in terms of perspectives represented, gender, ethnicity, and age. Thus, the activities were attended by representatives from civil society, academia, educational institutions, the media, public institutions, and citizens (Roma and non-Roma).

2.2. The objectives of the event

Objective of the event

The final deliberative event which took place in Rome on the 8th of May 2024 at Spazio Europa (managed by the EU Representatives in Italy) constituted the “convergence phase” of the participatory process, because after having explored the multiple dimensions of the topic from a local perspective, the participants from the three countries worked together to develop intervention strategies and shared actions for the future.

Specific objectives:

1. Define what can be done at the EU-level to improve public awareness on Roma history, culture, and society (including the recognition of Samudaripen).
2. Define what can be done at the EU-level to improve the fight against Roma discrimination.



2.3. Description of the event

2.3.1. Timetable

16.30-17.30: Greetings and introduction in plenary

17.30-18.00: Session 1 in working groups: **"What do we need at the EU level to improve public awareness on Roma history, culture and society?"**

18.00-18.30: Session 2 in working groups: **"What do we need at the EU level to better fight against Roma discrimination?"**

18.30-18.40: Coffee break

18.40-18.50: Results presentation

18.50-19.00: Conclusions

2.3.2. The event in short

The event opened with a series of **introductory remarks**. Alessandro Pistecchia from the Italian National Office against Racial Discrimination, a key supporter of the project and event, delivered an opening speech. This was followed by Sandro Turcio from the National Research Council (IRPPS-CNR), the leading partner of the REGARD project, who introduced the project and read a speech by Pier Virgilio Dastoli, President of the Italian branch of the European Movement. Then, Veljko Kajtazi - representative of the Croatian partner of the project and Member of the Croatian Parliament representing 12 national minorities, including Roma – and Izabela Tiberiade - project coordinator of the Romanian partner Romilor Dolj – addressed the public via Zoom, bringing the greetings of their respective organizations. Then Santino Spinelli, representative of the Italian partner Them Romano, delivered a speech emphasizing the imperative of preserving the memory of the Romani community's experiences during World War II, and stressing the need for comprehensive European legislation to address the Samudaripen. Finally, Francesca Fazio, associate member and project manager of Avventura Urbana, outlined the event's agenda and methodology.

Subsequently, participants were divided into **small groups** - both in situ and online- with a facilitator for each group that helped guiding the discussion in the participants' mother tongue, ensuring effective communication and guidance.

The discussion sessions lasted one hour and covered two topics. The first session addressed the question: **"What do we need at the EU level to enhance public awareness of Roma history, culture, and society?"**; while session 2 focused on **"What do we need at the EU level to combat Roma discrimination more effectively?"**.



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At the end of the two discussion sessions, Francesca Fazio presented the results of what emerged by the different groups. To conclude she gave once again the word to Santino Spinelli, who in a closing address, expressed heartfelt gratitude to all participants and partner associations, underscoring the importance of sustained collaboration and advocacy in advancing the noble objectives of the REGARD project.

2.3.3. Methodology

The methodology employed was inspired by the Electronic Town Meeting, a **deliberative democracy** tool that combines small-group discussions with technology, thus enabling smooth and timely management of information.

Each discussion session focused on the main topics that had already emerged during the participatory activities carried out in the three partner countries during the project, which were expressed in the form of **keywords**. This list of key words, although not exhaustive, served as a guide during the discussion: the facilitators presented them to the group as a basis for discussion, encouraging participants to identify the most relevant ones and to suggest further themes, if they deemed it necessary.

The facilitators were responsible for reporting in real time what emerged from their group's discussions to a central control unit (called the "Theme team") made up of representatives from Italy, Romania and Croatia, ensuring a fluid and continuous exchange of information. This approach allowed us to observe which keywords were most discussed and which new words emerged from the different working groups. The results of all the working groups of the three countries were then summarized and translated by the central team which illustrated them in a **single wordcloud in English**, visually indicating the most discussed words (larger graphically), the less discussed ones (smaller). The wordclouds were presented in the closing plenary session of the meeting and are reported below. The final chapter illustrates in detail what emerged from the discussion.



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Session 1 wordcloud

What do we need at the EU level to enhance public awareness of Roma history, culture, and society?

Positive content Roma media
Oral dissemination
Scientific research Media training
Youth involvement
School curriculum
Social media campaigns
Raising awareness
Cultural events
Media literacy
Financial compensations
Scientific dissemination Hate speech Publications



Session2 wordcloud

What do we need at the EU level to combat Roma discrimination more effectively?

drop-out regulations volunteering
school textbooks rights
trained teachers craftsmanship
de-ghettoization change of tradition
inter-cultural dialogue individual mentorship
roma parents' involvement artistic content
school desegregation
bureaucratic simplification
minority laws roma representation
scholarships civil education
identity didactic equipment extracurricular support
employment opportunities



3. Results of the event

This chapter describes the topics discussed in more detail, providing a summary of what emerged from the various working groups of the three countries involved.

3.3. Session 1

The first discussion session was dedicated to reflecting on how to improve public awareness on Roma history, culture and society. The discussion focused on two main topics: improving the recognition of Samudaripen; and improving information on Roma (history, culture, social issues etc.).

3.3.1. Improving the recognition of Samudaripen

Research and scientific dissemination

During the discussion, participants emphasized that research and dissemination related to the Samudaripen, as well as the broader history of the Roma people, are often delayed and lack sufficient funding. They stressed the need for continuous discovery and research of historical documents and suggested the establishment of dedicated study centers. Highlighting research results through targeted dissemination actions was also deemed crucial.

Oral dissemination

Participants reflected on the importance of oral dissemination, noting that it often remains the primary means of communication for older generations less familiar with modern technology.

School curriculum

The integration of Samudaripen into school curricula and textbooks was partially discussed. Participants argued that educating children about Roma history and culture from an early age is essential for fostering understanding and reducing prejudice.

Youth involvement

During the discussion, participants underscored the importance of involving youth in activities related to Samudaripen, promoting public gatherings and activities that include both Roma and non-Roma young people. They also mentioned the necessity of adult involvement in outreach activities, leading to the addition of the keyword "**adults' involvement**", as they are the educators of the future generations.

Raising awareness



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Participants agreed on the importance of organizing public events to share information and increase awareness about Roma culture and society. They emphasized involving Roma people as main actors in these initiatives to ensure advocacy and recognize their skills and professionalism. Participants also suggested new representations of Roma people in film and literature and proposed the introduction of cultural mediators in public services.

Moreover, it was noted that organizing public events to raise awareness should originate from the community rather than institutions to maintain authenticity and relevance.

Financial compensations to the victims' families

While recognized as important, the topic of financial compensations to victims' families was not extensively discussed.

3.3.2. Improving information on Roma (history, culture, social issues etc.)

Cultural events

The organization of demonstrations, events, and festivals was mentioned as a key strategy to increase public awareness and celebrate Roma culture.

Media training

Participants highlighted the need for training media employees to combat disinformation about Roma issues and ensure truthful content. They noted the persistence of negative stereotypes in media portrayals of Roma communities. In addition, it was argued that new accurate representations of Romani people, often the subject of unrepresentative and untruthful stereotyping, should also be proposed in cinema and literature.

To further improve understanding and knowledge on Roma issues, participants proposed the introduction of cultural mediators in the public sphere and services. As a result, "**cultural mediator**" was included as a new keyword.

Roma media

Fostering the enrolment of Roma individuals in journalism studies and incentivizing their employment in both mainstream and specialized media was emphasized. This approach was seen as crucial for accurate representation and giving Roma communities a platform for expressing themselves.

Positive content

Participants discussed the need to increase the visibility of positive news about Roma and stop ethnic identification in crime reporting. They advocated for focusing on positive representations to combat stereotypes.



Hate speech

During the discussion, the importance of improving hate speech regulation was underscored. Participants emphasized the urgent need to educate young people on how to safeguard themselves from misinformation and hate speech, particularly within the realm of social media. Furthermore, participants highlighted that discriminatory narratives targeting Roma communities are frequently exploited in political campaigns. To address this issue, they proposed ongoing engagement with politicians and the implementation of stricter regulatory measures. Notably, there was a suggestion for political candidates to commit to adhering to the EU Council Recommendations on Roma inclusion by signing relevant documents.

Additionally, the discussion brought forth a new keyword: "**storytelling**". Participants observed that the prevailing narrative surrounding Roma often unjustly associates them with delinquency. This harmful portrayal persists in contemporary election campaigns and certain television programs, perpetuating systemic discrimination against Roma communities.

Media literacy

Teaching young people in schools how to protect themselves from disinformation was identified as a necessary step to counteract negative stereotypes and misinformation.

Social media campaigns

Participants stressed the importance of improving information and countering disinformation and stereotypes about the Roma community through social media campaigns. They emphasized the role of social networks among younger populations and the need for educational and entertaining content on relevant topics.

Publications

While recognized as important, the topic of publications was not extensively discussed.

3.4. Session 2

The second session focused on how to fight discrimination against Roma people. The discussion focused on two main topics: improving the education of Romani communities; improving social and institutional inclusion.

3.4.1. Improving the education of the Roma community

Scholarships



On the issue of education, scholarships were said to be essential to ensure equal opportunities in marginalized contexts. Participants emphasized the need for scholarship opportunities to empower Roma education and reduce dropout rates.

School textbooks

The issue of legal recognition of the Romani language was related to the production of teaching materials and textbooks, which were considered key elements. Recognition and attention to language protection would allow to produce textbooks in the Romani language. Additionally, it was stated that the school curriculum should be supplemented with content regarding the history of Samudaripen, Roma society, and its culture, which is currently often omitted and only addressed at the discretion of knowledgeable or sensitive teachers.

Trained teachers

The participants addressed the issue of teacher training, which was deemed necessary to prevent and counter discriminatory behavior often occurring in educational contexts. It was argued that training sessions for professionals should provide opportunities for self-reflection to identify, prevent, and counteract discrimination.

Extracurricular support

This keyword was not a major focus during the discussion, although personalized guidance and resources are important for supporting Roma students outside the regular curriculum.

School desegregation

This topic did not receive extensive discussion, but participants acknowledged the importance of fighting segregation in school systems to ensure Roma students have equal educational opportunities.

Roma parents' involvement

Education of Roma parents on the importance of education, especially pre-schooling, and especially women, was recognized as important but was not deeply explored during the session.

Drop-out regulations

Stronger laws regulating the obligatory finishing of school were mentioned as necessary but were not extensively discussed.

Didactic equipment

Although securing necessary equipment for Roma students is indeed important, this keyword was not discussed much during the session.



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3.4.2. Improving social and institutional inclusion

Roma representation

Participants highlighted the necessity of increasing Roma representation in state institutions to gain decision-making power in public spaces and promote and defend their rights. In addition to advocating for existing measures, they suggested a new keyword, “**Roma women representation**” to emphasize improving the status of Roma women, who face multiple layers of discrimination.

Minority laws

During the discussion, participants stressed that it is necessary to act at the legislative level, reforming or introducing minority laws to protect the rights of Roma communities. Regarding legislative aspects and minority rights in Italy, it was argued that current legislation does not appear to be protective of the Romani population. Reference was made in particular to Law 482 of 1999 on the protection of linguistic-historical minorities, which does not include the Romani language among those protected. To improve this situation, it is believed that European law should be more binding on the protection and non-discrimination of minorities so that, consequently, the legislation of member states can become so as well.

Identity

Encouraging an authentic affirmation of Roma identity was discussed as important to counteract ethnic mimicry (hiding one’s identity) and cultural exasperation (associating Roma identity with folkloristic stereotypes). Participants emphasized the need for initiatives that promote a genuine and proud expression of Roma identity. Moreover, they also highlighted the ongoing struggle with cultural identity, which sometimes leads individuals to change their surnames.

Rights

Participants discussed the discrepancy between principles affirmed at the European level and their implementation at national and local levels, negatively impacting the enforceability of citizenship rights, particularly in housing, education, work, health, and social assistance. The complexity of bureaucratic procedures was highlighted as a barrier. This discussion led to the addition of a new keyword, “**bureaucracy**”, emphasizing the need for streamlined procedures to obtain necessary documents without undue complications.

De-ghettoization

Re-thinking urban spaces to enhance interactions between Roma and other community members in public spaces was considered essential. De-ghettoization was deemed an



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indispensable precondition for countering discrimination, alongside school desegregation.

Inter-cultural dialogue

Organizing debates to foster intercultural dialogue and tolerance was recognized as important, though it was not extensively discussed.

Volunteering

Engaging Roma people in volunteering activities, both as volunteers and receivers, was mentioned to increase encounter opportunities but was not a major focus during the session.

Craftsmanship

Enhancing the value of Roma craftsmanship as a local resource was acknowledged as important but did not receive extensive discussion.