

Policy brief



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Policy brief - “Where We Belong: Claiming Rights, Space, and Representation”

Project: “Where We Belong: Claiming Rights, Space, and Representation”

Reporting period: October–January 2026

Deliverable under Activity A5 – Drafting policy or legislation recommendations

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing the Lived Experiences of Romani Queer Women through an Intersectional Approach

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Executive Summary

Romani queer women (lesbian, bisexual, trans, and non-binary people) face alarming and systemic discrimination at the intersection of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and other identities. They report profound exclusion in employment, housing, healthcare, political and public participation. Their experiences remain widely invisible within the human rights movement at large as well as within both Roma and LGBTIQ+ advocacy efforts as research¹ shows.

Community-based structures and advocates play a key role in facilitating access of Romani queer women to social, economic, civil and political rights. They do however struggle with access to funding, visibility on the public and political agenda, and racism and discrimination within

¹ EL*C (2025) Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians* in the EU



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LGBTIQ+ and feminist movements. These preclude development of sustainable interventions to address the complex challenges facing Romani queer women as well as durable support programmes.

The existing regional and national policy frameworks yet fall short to incorporate intersectional perspectives leaving Romani queer women outside of their scope. Such policy gap thrusts them in limbo without acknowledging their intersectional inequalities and subsequently offering no legal protection and redress measures fit on their needs.

This policy brief navigates the specific challenges facing Romani queer women and proposes ways to develop a harmonised and intersectional policy framework in Europe. A coagulated policy approach requires integrating tailored measures for Romani queer women into the anti-racism strategy, Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, LGBTIQ+ equality strategy and other relevant policies. In addition, the policymaking process must be informed by meaningful consultations with Romani queer women.

Introduction

Setting the scene - navigating the situation of Romani queer women

The lived experiences and particular struggles of Romani queer women in Europe remain broadly underresearched, undocumented and therefore underreported. This leads to exclusion from legal and advocacy initiatives leaving them behind without proper recognition of the complexity of their challenges. Lacking to acknowledge the intersectional forms of discrimination and violence facing Romani queer women perpetuates inequitable behaviours towards them with no ways for redress and better protection of their rights.

To that end, the needs of Romani queer women are not translated into policy measures that would address their intersecting challenges. While the European Union designed and put in place



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frameworks that combat racism, gender discrimination and homophobia, the unique challenges of those who face intersectional discrimination are not addressed as such. Subsequently the situation of Romani queer women continues to be underlooked into policymaking processes. Such critical dissonance in policy matters severely impacts the freedom, equality and dignity of all Roma queers.

To adequately ensure that Romani queer women are not left behind and their rights are protected and promoted, the decision making stakeholders have to adopt intersectional lenses. Such an approach helps to recognise how the identities of Romani queer women come together in ways that lead to complex forms of discrimination that cannot be addressed by focusing on only one aspect of their identity.

Why an intersectional approach?

Intersectionality is a term coined by the scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American critical race scholar and civil rights activist. The concept recognizes that different aspects of identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation and others can be subject to overlapping and interconnected forms of discrimination.

“Roma [...] women are not only affected by antigypsyism, but are also often subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination [...] this intersectional discrimination aggravates the inequalities from which Roma [...] women and girls suffer and that it leads to particular vulnerabilities.” — Recommendation Rec(2024)1 of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers to member States on equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls

Advocating for intersectional justice



The Romnja Feminist Library engaged in a robust commitment to amplify the voices of Romani queer women and advocate for better protection of their rights. It specifically aims to engage in a meaningful dialogue with decision makers in the European Union for navigating the challenges facing Romani queer women and proposing ways forward to tackle these concerns. The present brief serves this very purpose.

In this respect, the Romnja Feminist Library through its advocacy efforts aims to highlight the systemic barriers to which Romani queer women are subjected to and champions the policy change. The policy proposals are designed based on personal narratives and experiences of Romani queer women with a view of humanising the issues and mobilising support for an inclusive and intersectional policy landscape. To that end, it documented the lived inequalities through firsthand consultations. This included three online storytelling workshops with participation of Romani queer women from Romania, Serbia, Germany and Spain. These avenues allowed participants to share how their identity and resilience intersect with and within systems of exclusion.

In addition, the Romnja Feminist Library contributed to the study “[*Intersectionality in action — when racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians in the EU*](#)” looking at the situation of Roma LBQ women. The data was collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured one-to-one interviews with Romani queer women from Spain, Germany, Romania. Also, the reflections shared during the Roundtable event “Policy dialogue on Romani lesbians” with participation of civil society organizations working on Roma, LGBTIQ+, and racial justice issues fed into this policy brief.

Grounded in the lived experiences of Romani queer women, this policy brief translates the collected testimonies into policy proposals. An intersectional perspective has been central through the design process to make sure that intersecting struggles are addressed as such.



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Who are we?

The [Romnja Feminist Library](#) is a transnational platform where Romani women and queer Roma reclaim narratives and fight for justice beyond borders and academia. Led by Romani queer feminists and built on the belief that our lived experiences, our stories, and our knowledge are powerful forms of resistance. Through research, community-led projects, and decolonial knowledge work, we challenge the structures that have kept our communities invisible in academic, policy, and activist spaces.

Intersectional inequalities facing Romani queer women

Employment and participation in job market

Romani queer women report intersectional discrimination occurring in job applications, interviews, and at the workplace. These include stereotyping, lesbophobia, heterosexist and sexual harassment, or dismissals. Such discriminatory behaviours and circumstances drive them into informal employment sectors without social security and legal protection. Thus it increases their vulnerability and risk of exploitation and abuse.

The scarcity of suitable and stable job opportunities for Romani queer women heighten their exposure to bullying and harassment. Some feel the need to conceal their ethnic or other identities in order to conform to 'white standards'. Others often feel discouraged from reporting discrimination out of fear of being outed.

The biased treatment of Romani queer women in the labor and the informal nature of the jobs available to them amplifies their economic insecurity. Additionally, the shrinking economic



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situation and educational opportunities trap many in a cycle of poverty. The employment discrimination directly impacts all spheres of life, from access to housing, to access to healthcare and to political participation. The economic exclusion extends to further make them invisible in society.

Access to housing

Discrimination based on visible racial markers, such as skin color or surname, is one of the most significant obstacles for Romani queer women in renting private housing. They are often forced to adjust their identity to conform to landlords' preferences and adopt different strategies to avoid discrimination and secure housing offers.

Romani queer women reported housing preferences in majority Roma neighborhoods where they feel safer because racial discrimination is less likely. However, this sense of safety often means living in segregated and underfunded areas with poor access to essential services. The lack of information about tenant's rights is yet another flagged issue.

The absence of sexuality- and race-based protections in tenancy laws for EU residents makes it challenging for racialized transgender and migrant Romani queer women to obtain safe housing. One of the most obvious consequences of housing discrimination is homelessness along with significant challenges posed in access to the labour market, health care and political participation.

Health care

Romani queer women often are subject to racism, sexism, lesbophobia, and transphobia in their healthcare experiences. Racial discrimination manifests in various forms, including verbal abuse,



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stereotyping hostile language, disbelief, dismissal and a lack of trust. The refusal to acknowledge sexual identities in combination with racial profiling and transphobia discourage them from seeking formal healthcare. These leave a bolt mark on their emotional, psychological, and physical safety and security.

Segregation and unequal treatment in healthcare facilities remain a worrying concern. Some women reported concealment of their sexual orientation out of fear of further mistreatment. When accessing mental health care, Romani queer women flag a profound lack of trauma-informed care and LGBTIQ-inclusive medical training tailored along with institutional discrimination by medical and mental health providers.

Access to reproductive rights raises serious concerns as well, with Romani queer women reporting numerous occurrences of gynecological and obstetric violence and racism. Although technically available in several EU countries, gender-affirming care remains highly inaccessible for Roma.

Political participation

The political arena remains inaccessible for many Romani queer women, particularly as candidates. Those who are running for the office often withdraw due to ongoing experiences of harassment, political violence and discrimination. Those who are holding decision-making positions within their own communities encounter anti-Roma sentiments from non-Roma peers, indicating a significant lack of acceptance and visibility in broader political contexts.

The lack of representation in decision making and executive powers make it even more difficult for Romani queer women to engage authentically in the political processes. This is particularly true as they face pressure to conform to a certain image to be considered fit for politics. Moreover, they are expected to “whiten” their identity or adopt a heteronormative image and



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conform to mainstream, conservative expectations to gain acceptance in both Roma and mainstream parties.

The concerns outlined above are articulated through testimonies of Romani queer women and professionals advocating on their behalf part of the research “[*Intersectionality in action — when racism gets in the way of LBO women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians in the EU*](#)”. These challenges however do not describe the full extent of difficulties and obstacles that this group is subjected to. The lack of both quantitative and qualitative data prevents from drawing a comprehensive overview of the situation and gaining an in-depth understanding of the context. The stories shared by Romani queer women in our storytelling workshops further highlight needs that remain largely unseen in policy debates and frameworks. Participants called for safe community spaces, culturally grounded emotional and mental-health support, and greater protection from violence. They described the exhaustion of hiding who they are and the absence of public narratives that reflect their identities and experiences. These insights directly echo our mission to create self-represented spaces for community building and to ensure that Romani queer women can be heard, influence decisions that affect their lives, and exist without fear.

Pathways for protection of Romani queer women’s rights

Put in place intersectional policy and legislative frameworks through:

1. Recognising the particular challenges facing Romani queer women at the policy levels and ensuring that relevant frameworks i.e., EU 2026-2030 Anti-racism Strategy, EU 2020-2030 Roma Strategic Framework and EU 2026-2030 LGBTIQ+ equality strategy include appropriate measures that tackles these particular challenges.

2. Safeguarding the protection of Romani queer women against intersectional discrimination and combating this phenomenon in line with provisions of the EU directives against discrimination and equal treatment.
3. Including the voices of Romani queer women advocates in consultations throughout policy and legislative design processes to ensure that their needs are addressed as such, to foster an intersectional EU policy and legislative framework, and to enhance the trust of Romani queer women in good governance and policy effectiveness.

Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of Romani queer women through:

1. Removing the obstacles and addressing intersectional inequalities experienced by Romani queer women in access to employment, education, housing, health care and political participation while ensuring that member states keep their obligations in this respect.
2. Tackling the intertwined and multiple manifestations of discrimination, violence, segregation and other forms of human rights violations to which Romani queer women are subjected to and funding for emotional and mental health support programmes.
3. Ensuring accessibility and affordability for Romani queer women to justice, legal protection and redress support by encouraging a holistic approach that considers particular struggles faced by this group.

Support Roma led civil society and community-based advocacy through:

1. Improving and simplifying access to funding for civil society and human rights defenders advocating with and for Romani queer women as well as ensuring that the EU Strategy for Civil Society is an inclusive framework which ensures support to this group of advocates.
2. Encouraging and funding quantitative and qualitative research that document the human rights situation of Romani queer women with particular support on initiatives and



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programmes that include human rights monitoring, advocacy and strategic litigation leading to sustainable impact.

3. Design and implement tailored support and empowering programmes for Romani queer human rights defenders to facilitate their participation in democratic processes, to protect them from various forms of violence and repressions, to enable cross-movement alliances and multilateral spaces.

This policy brief was developed within the project “Where We Belong: Claiming Rights, Space, and Representation” implemented by Romnja Feminist Library. “This project is funded by the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community and co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Romnja Feminist Library implementing the project, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community, nor of the European Union.”*

Research summary report



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Research summary – “Where We Belong: Claiming Rights, Space, and Representation”

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This research summary presents key findings on the lived realities of Romani lesbian, bisexual, queer, and non-binary women in Europe. It synthesizes existing research conducted with the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community (EL*C), *alongside community-based knowledge gathered through consultations and project activities. The summary documents patterns of intersecting discrimination affecting Romani lesbians** and provides an evidence base to inform advocacy and policy engagement carried out within the project.

Research basis and sources

The findings outlined in this summary are grounded in:

- The EL*C study *“Intersectionality in action — when racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons”*, based on 55 in-depth interviews with Black, racialised, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians in the EU
- Roma LBQ-specific data collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with Romani queer women in Spain, Germany, Romania, and Serbia
- Thematic reflections emerging from stakeholder consultations and the policy dialogue on Romani lesbians* held in Brussels



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Key findings

Employment and Economic Exclusion

Romani queer women face persistent barriers to employment, including racial profiling, discriminatory recruitment practices, workplace harassment, and unfair dismissals. Many participants reported being pushed into precarious or informal work and concealing aspects of their identity as a survival strategy.

As one research participant noted:

“When I finally accepted my Roma identity at work, I noticed that I was treated differently by both my employer and colleagues. The discrimination I faced intensified.”

*(Roma lesbian, Romania, EL*C study)*

Housing and spatial exclusion

Discrimination in the housing market restricts access to safe and stable accommodation. Participants described racial profiling by landlords, forced concealment of identity, and reliance on intermediaries perceived as more “acceptable” to secure housing.

This experience was captured by one participant:

“To rent the apartment, I’ve always had to go because I speak a different language, I have a different presence (white-passing), and they see that I have a stable job.”

*(Roma lesbian, Spain, EL*C study)*

Healthcare barriers

Healthcare systems frequently fail Romani queer women through intersecting racism, sexism, lesbophobia, and transphobia. Participants reported fear, dismissal of medical needs, lack of trauma-informed care, and unequal treatment compared to non-Roma patients.



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One participant shared:

“When you go to the doctor, you often find yourself thinking about how you will be treated... I know you have the right to request a change of doctor because my non-Roma friends have been given that option, but I was not because I am Roma.”

*(Roma bisexual woman, Spain, EL*C study)*

Political participation and representation

Romani queer women remain largely excluded from political and decision-making spaces. Structural barriers, harassment, and pressure to conform to heteronormative and racialised norms limit opportunities for political engagement and leadership.

As one participant explained:

“If you’re willing to take on a populist discourse, embrace icons, and present yourself as heterosexual, then yes, you can make a career in politics.”

*(Roma lesbian, Romania, EL*C study)*

Cross-cutting insight

The research confirms that Romani lesbians* experience intersecting and mutually reinforcing forms of discrimination that cannot be adequately addressed through single-axis approaches. Racism, sexism, lesbophobia, and class-based exclusion shape their access to rights and services in ways that remain insufficiently reflected in existing Roma inclusion, gender equality, and LGBTIQ+ frameworks at both EU and national levels.

Use of findings

This research summary informed the development of the project’s policy brief and advocacy activities. It ensured that subsequent policy engagement was grounded in qualitative, community-based evidence and the lived experiences of Romani lesbians*.



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