

# Project: “Roma Influencers breaking the circle of early marriages and early motherhood in Roma communities”



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[www.romainfluencersnetwork.eu](http://www.romainfluencersnetwork.eu) [romainfluencersnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:romainfluencersnetwork@gmail.com) [Roma Influencers Network](https://www.facebook.com/Roma-Influencers-Network) [Roma\\_Influencers\\_Network](https://www.instagram.com/Roma_Influencers_Network)

## Policy Recommendations Work Package 3 Activity 3.4 Greece

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## 1. Executive Summary

Early marriage and early motherhood in Roma communities in Greece constitute a complex social phenomenon closely linked to poverty, social exclusion, and gender inequalities. Despite the existing legal framework establishing 18 as the minimum age of marriage, practices of early unions/ “marriages” continue to occur.

This policy paper proposes a comprehensive approach that combines:

- institutional reforms
- economic incentives
- participatory governance
- empowerment of Roma girls

Particular emphasis is placed on **innovative policy interventions**, aligned with the framework of the European Commission on Roma inclusion and the guidelines of the Council of Europe.

## 2. Introduction

Early marriages (marriages under the age of 18) are internationally recognized as a violation of human rights and are associated with:

- interruption of education
- limited economic participation
- increased health risks (UNICEF, 2021)

Within Roma communities, the phenomenon is embedded in a broader context of:

- intergenerational poverty
- social exclusion
- cultural and social norms

## 3. Legal and Policy Framework

### 3.1 Greece

According to the Greek Civil Code:

- Minimum age of marriage: 18 years
- Exception: judicial authorization for minors

This exception has been criticized as a mechanism that allows circumvention of the law (Greek Ombudsman, 2018).

### Policy Principles

Policies should be grounded in the following principles:

1. **A human rights-based approach**
2. **Non-stigmatization** of Roma communities
3. **Community participation** (community-led approaches)
4. **A cross-sectoral approach** (education–health–social policy)

### Integrated Approach (Policy Mix)

Effective policy requires a combination of:

- Legislation
- Education





- Social protection
- Health services
- Community participation

## Policy Recommendations

### 1. Legislative Interventions

- Abolish or strictly limit exceptions allowing marriage under the age of 18
- Strengthen oversight of judicial decisions permitting underage marriage
- Explicitly recognize early marriage as a form of **gender-based violence**

### 2. Education

- Ensure compulsory school attendance (especially for Roma girls)
- Promote the role of Roma mediators within the education system

Important: School dropout is a key driver of early marriage

- Invest in livelihood training, vocational skills, and financial literacy for adolescent girls to offer alternatives to early marriage.
- Implement life-skills training and create safe spaces for adolescent girls to build self-confidence and knowledge of their rights.
- Integrate comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education into school curriculums and community programs to promote responsible decision-making and contraceptive use

### 3. Health and Reproductive Rights

- **Perigenetic and Epigenetic Dimension**

Strengthening policies aimed at preventing early marriages and early motherhood can be enriched through a **modern public health approach that takes into account the role of perigenetics and epigenetics**. Living conditions before, during, and after pregnancy — such as poverty, chronic stress, limited access to healthcare, education, and social support — affect not only the current health of both mother and child, but also future developmental opportunities.

For this reason, **targeted interventions are proposed to support young Roma women and families, with an emphasis on prenatal care, mental health, parenting education, and the creation of stable, safe environments that enhance intergenerational social mobility and equal opportunities**.

- Ensure access to:
  - family planning services
  - prenatal care
- Deploy mobile health units in Roma settlements
- Provide education on sexual and reproductive health



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- Provide specialized antenatal and childbirth care to mitigate high risks of complications for young pregnant girls.
- Provide psychosocial support and mental health services to combat isolation, and create peer networks.
- Establish and enforce policies that allow pregnant girls and young mothers to return to school after giving birth.

#### 4. Social Policy and Child Protection

- Establish early intervention mechanisms
- Strengthen municipal social services
- Promote collaboration with:
  - social workers
  - NGOs
  - local communities

#### 5. Empowerment of Roma Girls and Women

- Develop programs for:
  - mentoring
  - vocational training
- Improve access to the labor market
- Promote positive role models

#### 6. Community-Based Approach

- Engage Roma community leaders
- Foster dialogue to transform social norms
- Design culturally sensitive interventions

Avoid policies that frame the issue solely as a “cultural problem” without addressing its social and structural dimensions

- Engage community leaders, religious leaders, and parents in dialogues to challenge harmful practices and promote gender equality.

#### 7. Data and Research

- Ensure systematic data collection
- Monitor:
  - age at marriage
  - teenage pregnancy rates
- Conduct regular policy evaluations
- **Early Warning System for Early Marriages**  
Establish an early detection system through:
  - schools
  - social services



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- healthcare units
- identification of:
- girls who drop out of school
  - cases of early pregnancy
  - activation of timely intervention measures
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## Conclusion

Early marriage and early motherhood in Roma communities should not be viewed merely as a “cultural practice,” but rather as practices that:

- are closely linked to **structural inequalities**
- contribute to the reproduction of **social exclusion**

Policy responses must therefore shift from simple prohibition toward **holistic, participatory, and rights-based interventions**



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