



Pro Vocem

Probationer's Voices Reviving Memories



Co-funded by
the European Union

Lived realities of Roma probationers in Romania



Universitatea de Vest
din Timișoara



MINISTERUL JUSTIȚIEI
DIRECȚIA NAȚIONALĂ DE PROBAȚIUNE



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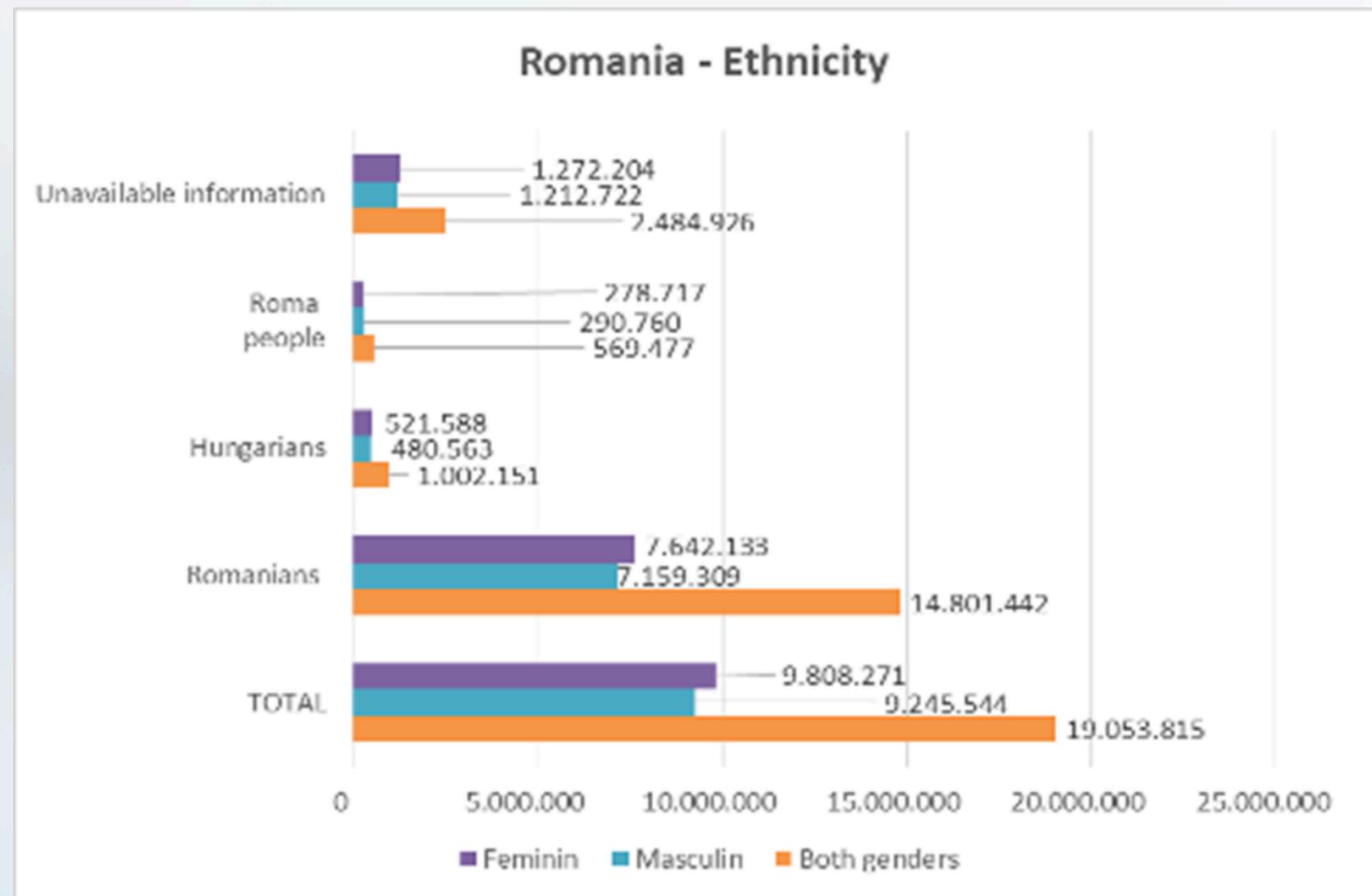
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Roma ethnics

Romanian national statistics

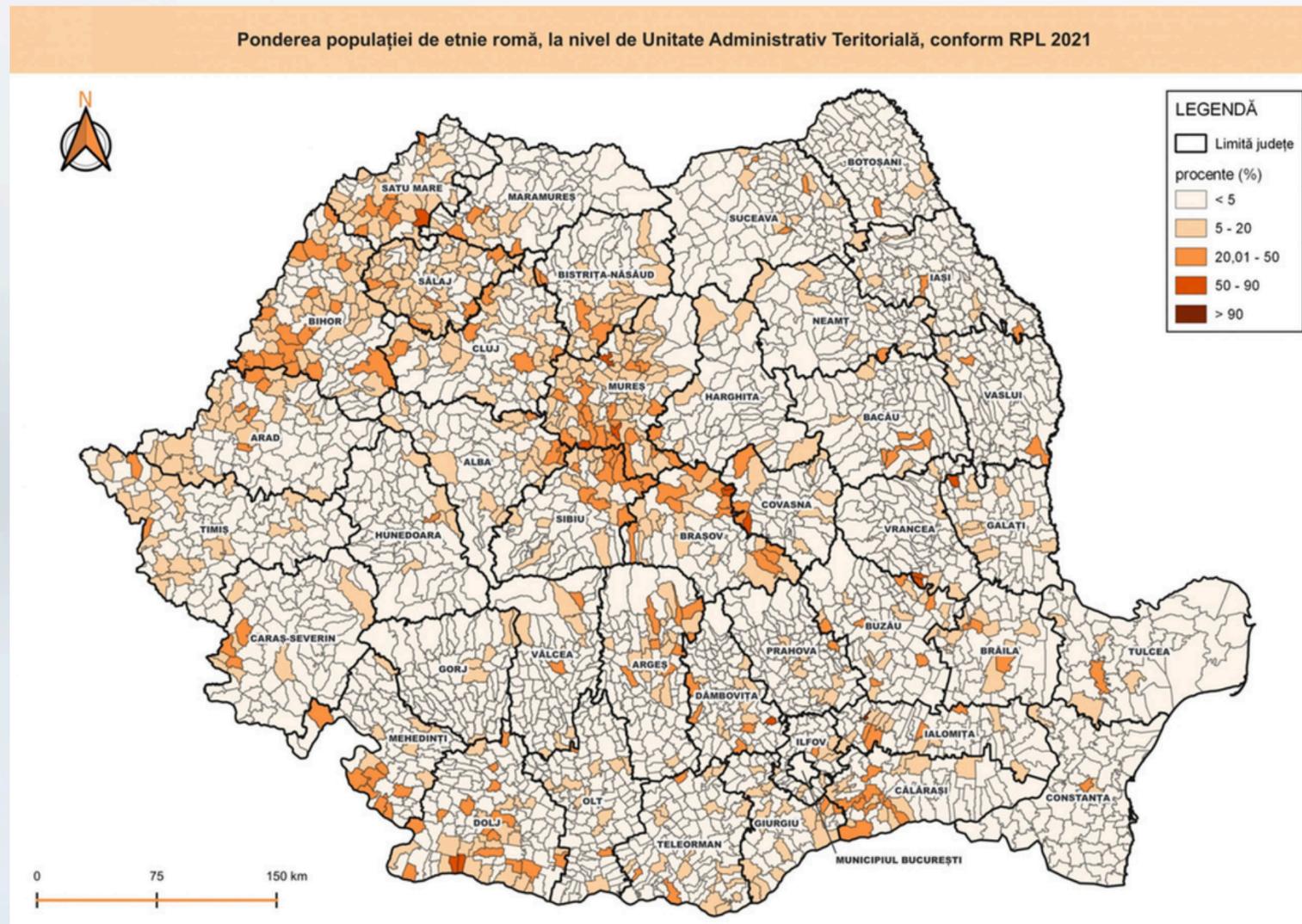
A significant part of the total Romanian population (approx. 3% according to the 2021 National Census).
The third ethnic entity in Romania, maybe even the second.



Source: INS, 2021 Population and Housing Census, provisional data

Roma ethnics

Romanian national statistics



The percentage of 3%, Roma population, as resulted from the 2021 National Romanian Census is somehow controversial, being considered too small compared to reality.

Source: INS, 2021, Representation of Roma ethnic density through Romania

3%

Census

8%

RNDP data

Limited research and information on Roma ethnics representation and experiences in the criminal justice system and probation services.

The largest minority ethnic and cultural group that Romanian Probation Services work with.

Historical background of Roma in Romania

Origins and Slavery of the Roma

Origins

- The Roma are a population of Indian origin.
- They migrated to the Balkans and later to Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.

Slavery Period (Middle Ages - 1856)

- Roma were enslaved by princes, boyars and monasteries.
- They could be sold or donated and had very limited rights.
- Main occupations: agriculture
crafts (especially blacksmithing)
music and manual trades

Slavery was abolished in 1856.



Historical background of Roma in Romania

Roma in the 20th Century

World War II

- Roma were persecuted during World War 2.
- Many were deported to concentration camps such as Auschwitz.
- Over 25,000 Roma from Romania were deported to Transnistria.

Communist Period

- Roma were not officially recognized as an ethnic minority.
- Policies aimed at forced assimilation and loss of cultural identity.

Historical background of Roma in Romania

Roma After 1989

Post-communist period

- Roma became officially recognized as an ethnic minority.
- Development of Roma organizations and political representation.

Current challenges

- Poverty and social exclusion
- Low education levels
- Difficult access to employment and services

Roma history is marked by migration, marginalization and resilience.



PRO VOCEM Research

2025, Romania

Research Purpose

To explore experiences of Racism and discrimination, Social exclusion, Interaction with probation services, and Historical Memory.

Specific Objectives

- Identify discrimination experiences.
- Understand historical influences.
- Amplify Roma voices.
- Improve probation interventions.



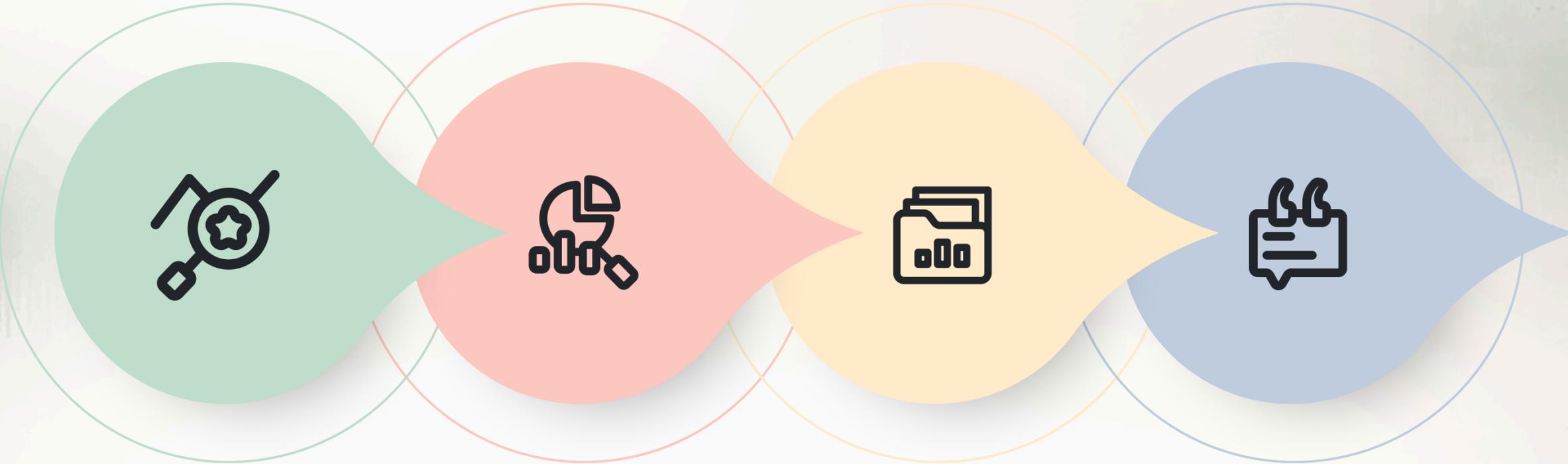
Study design



Qualitative research

- **Semi-structured interviews**
- **Historical document analysis**
- **Participatory observation**
- **Narrative and thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis



Primary data

82 interviewed persons

Initial coding and defining main themes

Grouping perspectives

Drafting report

Sampling

Target group: Roma probationers and family members

Inclusion criteria: Roma people who have experienced contact with the probation system as supervised persons (men and women) and their family members, with an emphasis on women; age - over 18 years.

Sampling method: purposive + snowball

Participants

82 Roma probationers and family members

4 Counties: Constanța, Ilfov, Ialomița, Timiș

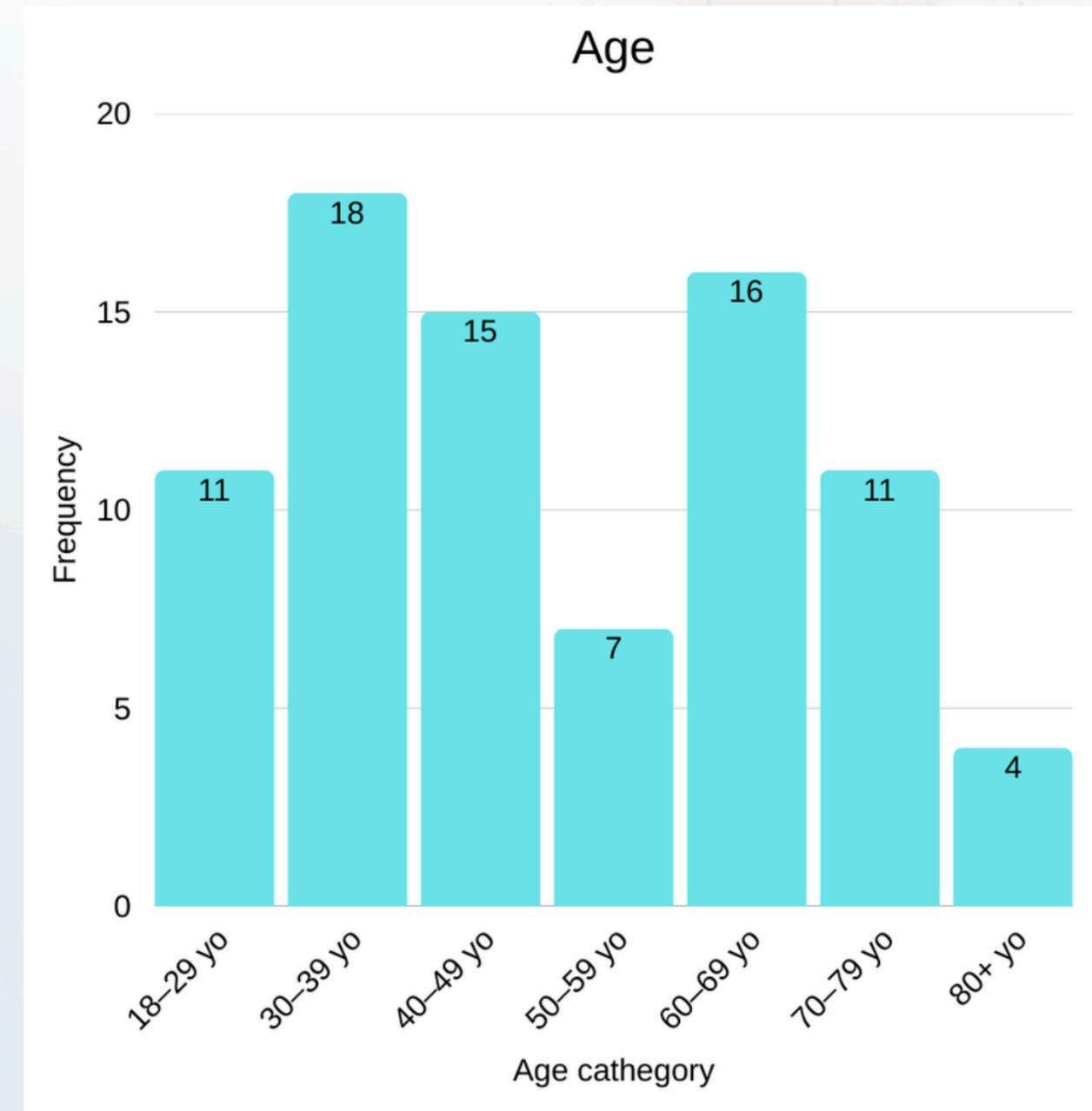
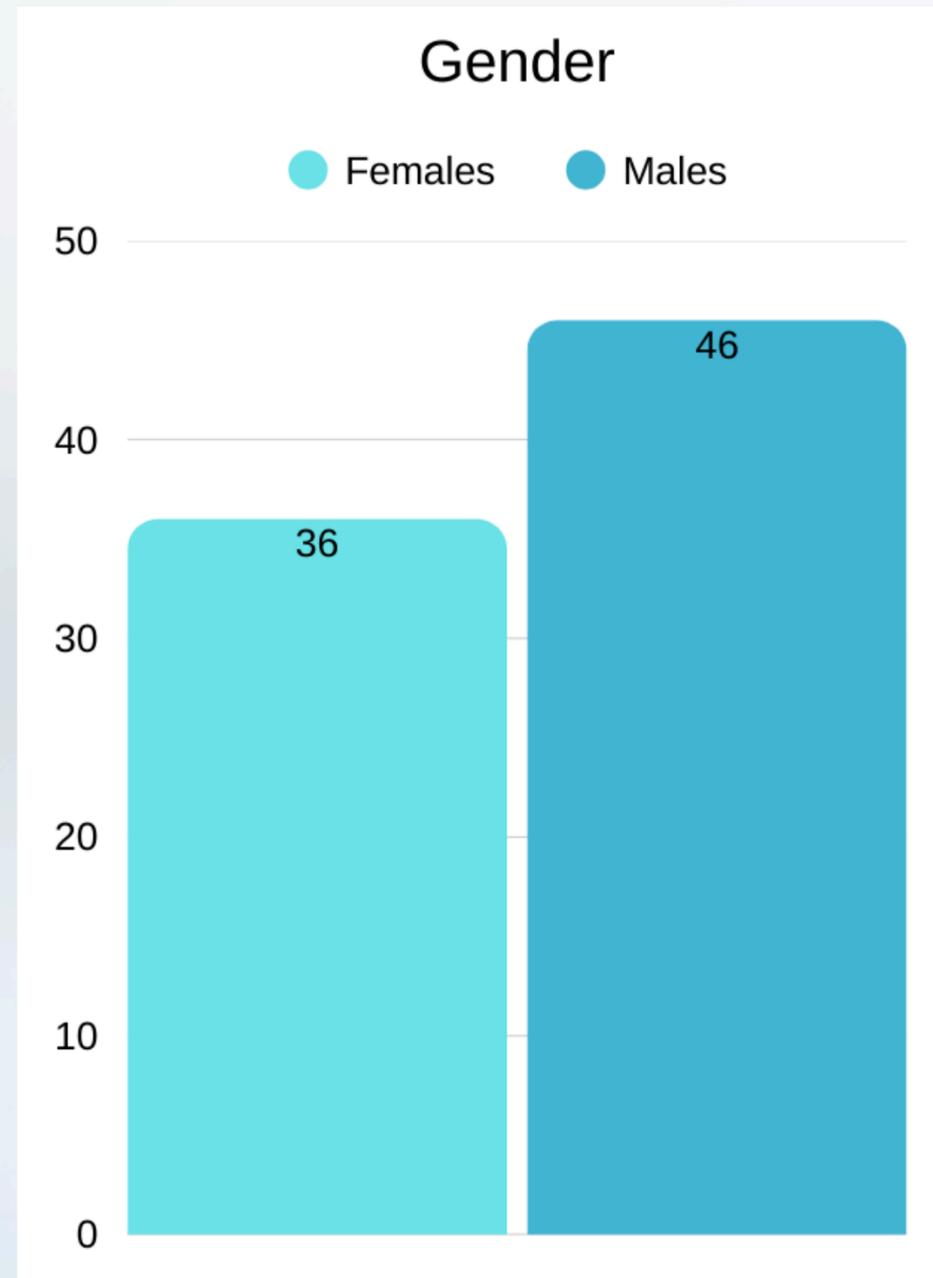
Age range: 18 - 94 years old

Gender: 36 females, 46 males

Interviews between may - september 2025

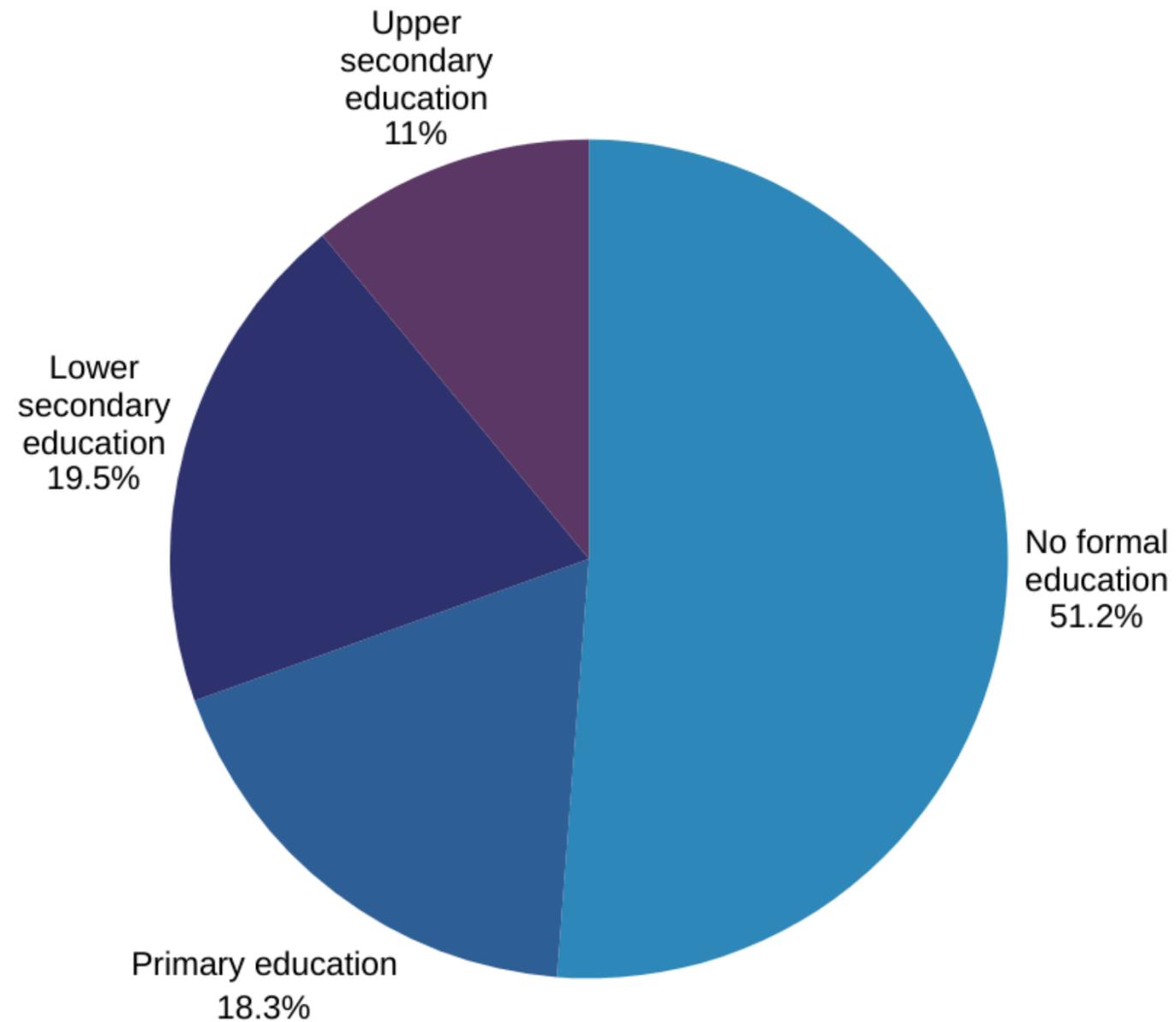


Socio demographic overview of interviewed persons



Socio demographic overview of interviewed persons

Level of education



Living area



Identity and personal experiences

Participants define themselves ethnically with clarity and without hesitation. **Many express pride or a sense of natural belonging to their Roma identity**, often phrased as something inherited and unquestionable (“this is how God made me,” “I was born this way”). For some, Roma identity carries positive moral attributes, such as respect, loyalty, or family cohesion.

A recurring pattern is the presence of **sub-group identities** within the Roma community. Participants often describe themselves not only as “Roma” or “țigani,” but as belonging to specific internal categories such as “German Roma,” “Sinti/Ghipțeri,” or “different kinds of Roma.” **These distinctions are frequently used to highlight cultural differences, lineage, or perceived moral superiority** (“we are more well-mannered,” “we are not like the others here”).

Gender and intersectionality

Gender inequalities are reinforced by poverty and low education.

Roma ethnicity, gender, and social marginalization intersect.

Restrictions on mobility, social life, or public presence.

Traditional roles in the family.

Modesty norms and clothing rules.

Earlier marriage or reduced schooling compared to boys.

Public visibility or independent socializing may be considered inappropriate.

Women having less autonomy historically.

Historical memory and migration

Historical memory appears as told by the elderly or fragmented, partial, or entirely absent for younger Roma participants.

Across many interviews, memories of deportation to Bug/Transnistria are transmitted across generations and function as a core narrative explaining family history and present conditions. Even younger participants who did not know details still described deportation as a defining experience of their ancestors.

Other respondents report not knowing family stories about deportations, migration, or major historical events affecting Roma. For many, this absence is explained by generational distance, lack of communication within families, or the belief that “those things happened to others, not to us.”

COVID 19

Across interviews, experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic show considerable variation and generally limited evidence of explicit ethnic discrimination. Most Roma participants describe neutral or fair treatment by institutions, particularly in healthcare and public administration. Several respondents reported that they were treated “like everyone else”.

Rather than systematic discrimination, experiences appear linked to generalized fear and uncertainty during the pandemic.

However, some participants described forms of stigma or discrimination.

Overall, the interviews suggest that the pandemic did not introduce widespread new forms of ethnic discrimination, but it highlighted existing structural vulnerabilities.

Relationship with the probation system

The interviews reveal a consistently positive perception of probation counsellors, with most participants emphasizing fairness, support, and respectful treatment. Only isolated accounts indicate mismatches or unmet needs.

Importantly, none of the participants reported ethnic discrimination within probation.

"Nothing has ever happened to me... they helped me."

"They behaved very nicely."

"It was a support... it calmed me down."

Solutions and hopes

Participants expressed a strong desire for society to see Roma people as equal human beings, without assumptions or prejudice

Several respondents describe how value and dignity are taken away the moment others realize they are Roma. One participant explains that people look at a Roma person “from a distance” and see a human being, but once they learn they are Roma, the person’s worth suddenly decreases. *“When they see you from far away, they see a human being... but when they find out you are Roma, they see you differently.”*

“There should be no difference between Roma and any other nation. We should all be the same.”

“Let people meet Roma, see who they really are, and only then judge. Go into their homes, and only then judge.”

Discrimination and racism

Across interviews, participants report clear moments of unequal or disrespectful treatment linked to their ethnicity. These experiences occur in hospitals, neighborhoods, workplaces, and daily interactions.

Everyday discrimination appears as an intermittent but recognizable experience, sometimes minimized or normalized by participants. Respectability and proper behavior are frequently described as strategies for avoiding stigma.

One woman describes being mocked in a hospital when she brought her child for treatment: *“I went to the hospital with the child... and the doctor told me: ‘Why did you come? What do you want?’ And she laughed at me.”*

“They called us names... they shouted from the street, insulting us because we are Roma.”

Case Study: Deportation and Family Memory

“My mother died on the way back... she could not continue and collapsed.” IF_04

Participant from rural Romania, Roma ethnicity, interview conducted with three family members.

- Deportation to Transnistria represents the central family historical trauma.
- Experiences transmitted intergenerationally from grandparents to children.

Key Historical Experiences

- Forced deportation based on deception.
- Long journey under military control.
- Extreme living conditions (hunger, cold, disease).
- Death of family members during deportation.

Meaning for the Family

- Deportation seen as a turning point in family history
- Explains current social vulnerability.
- Source of collective identity and survival.



Case Study: Deportation and Family Memory

Key Themes

Identity and Discrimination

- Strong Roma identity combined with desire for social inclusion.
- Discrimination often normalized and avoided to prevent conflict.
- Roma women more exposed due to visible ethnic markers (traditional dress).

Role of Probation

- Probation perceived as supportive institution.
- Help with documents and social support.
- Participant learned reading and writing during supervision.

Resilience Factors

- Strong family cohesion
- Intergenerational memory
- Institutional support
- Adaptation strategies



Round Table

Intercultural Dialogue and Inclusive Practices Experts' Contribution to Supporting the Roma Community

19 November 2025

West University of Timișoara

21 specialists from: Romania, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, Moldova - Probation professionals, Researchers and academics, NGOs and international organizations, Public authorities, Students

Purpose

- Forum for academic and professional dialogue
- Understanding systemic challenges faced by Roma probationers
- Connecting research findings and practice



Round Table

Intercultural Dialogue and Inclusive Practices Experts' Contribution to Supporting the Roma Community

Main Themes Identified

- Strong Roma identity and cultural belonging
- Roma women face multiple discrimination
- Evidence of intergenerational marginalization
- Spatial segregation and limited access to resources

Probation System

- Participants reported generally positive relationships with probation officers
- Evidence of increasing cultural sensitivity



Round Table

Intercultural Dialogue and Inclusive Practices Experts' Contribution to Supporting the Roma Community

Key Recommendations

- Develop culturally sensitive probation interventions
- Use intersectional and trauma-informed approaches
- Strengthen family-centered reintegration programs
- Increase interinstitutional cooperation

Project Impact

- Strengthened partnerships
- Improved understanding of Roma experiences
- Support for future inclusion policies





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