

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	[1] - [WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMIȘOARA] (WUT)
PIC number:	[999635150]
Project name and acronym:	[Probationers' Voices Reviving Memories] — [PRO-VOCEM]

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	[1]
Event name:	[Research Report on Collected Roma Testimonies & Awareness Raising Workshops]
Type:	[R — Document, report]
In situ/online:	in-situ
Location:	[Romania], [Timiș County]; [Bulgaria], [Sofia City]; [Romania], [Dâmbovița County]; [Romania], [Giurgiu County]; [Romania], [Călărași County]; [Romania], [Ilfov County]; [Romania], [Buzău County]; [Romania], [Constanța County]; [Romania], [Ialomița County]; [Romania], [Bucharest]; [Bulgaria], [Blagoevgrad Province]; [Bulgaria], [Kyustendil Province]; [Bulgaria], [Pernik Province]; [Bulgaria], [Burgas Province]; [Bulgaria], [Sliven Province]; [Bulgaria], [Haskovo Province]; [Bulgaria], [Yambol Province]; [Bulgaria], [Varna Province]; [Bulgaria], [Dobrich Province]; [Bulgaria], [Silistra Province]; [Bulgaria], [Shumen Province]; [Bulgaria], [Veliko Tarnovo Province]; [Bulgaria], [Gabrovo Province]; [Bulgaria], [Razgrad Province]; [Bulgaria], [Ruse Province]; [Bulgaria], [Targovishte Province]; [Bulgaria], [Pleven Province]; [Bulgaria], [Vidin Province]; [Bulgaria], [Vratsa Province]; [Bulgaria], [Montana Province]; [Bulgaria], [Plovdiv Province]; [Bulgaria], [Kardzhali Province]; [Bulgaria], [Smolyan Province]; [Bulgaria], [Sofia City]; [Bulgaria], [Sofia Province]; [Bulgaria], [Stara Zagora Province].
Date(s):	[19/11/2025], [16/12/2025], [16/06/2026], [16/06/2026], [17/06/2026], [18/06/2026], [22/06/2026], [23/06/2026], [23/06/2026], [24/06/2026], [25/06/2026], [01/06/2026], [05/06/2026], [05/06/2026], [28/04/2026], [05/06/2026], [29/04/2026], [15/05/2026], [20/05/2026], [13/05/2026], [01/06/2026], [08/05/2026], [08/05/2026], [28/04/2026], [15/05/2026], [15/05/2026], [05/06/2026], [15/05/2026], [27/04/2026], [15/05/2026], [24/04/2026], [22/05/2026], [04/06/2026], [29/05/2026], [18/05/2026], [15/05/2026], [05/06/2026]
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.uvt.ro/provocem/
Participants	

Female:	292		
Male:	181		
Non-binary:	1		
From country 1 [Romania]:	172		
From country 2 [Bulgaria]:	293		
From country 3 [Netherlands]:	1		
From country 4 [Belgium]:	1		
From country 5 [Spain]:	2		
From country 6 [Germany]:	1		
From country 7 [Slovakia]:	1		
From country 8 [Republic of Moldova]:	1		
Total number of participants:	472	From total number of countries:	7 EU Countries

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

The event consisted of a series of in-situ research and awareness-raising activities carried out across Romania and Bulgaria under WP2 – Raising Public Awareness. Activities included the analysis of Roma testimonies, the organisation of awareness-raising activities and two expert round tables, discussions, and the documentation of research findings for the Romanian and Bulgarian Research Reports. These activities supported the work package objective of increasing public understanding of Roma history, culture, and social inclusion while promoting intercultural dialogue and evidence-based awareness raising.

The event engaged 472 participants from 7 EU countries and the Republic of Moldova, contributing to the collection of qualitative evidence, the dissemination of knowledge on Roma communities, and the strengthening of cross-border cooperation among researchers, practitioners, students, and local stakeholders. The resulting reports consolidates the research methodology, collected testimonies, workshop outcomes, and key findings, providing an evidence base for the project's subsequent awareness-raising, educational, and dissemination activities.

Further details on the Romanian and Bulgarian research reports are provided in Annex 1.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	30.06.2026	Initial version.

Annex 1 - Research Reports on Collected Roma Testimonies (Romania and Bulgaria) related to Event 2 (WP2 Raising Public Awareness)

Lead beneficiary: WUT

Involved Consortium Organizations:

- West University of Timișoara
- Romanian National Probation Directorate
- Penal Reform International
- General Directorate Execution of Sentences, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

Within the PRO-VOCEM project, qualitative research was conducted in Romania and Bulgaria to document the lived experiences of Roma probationers and their family members. The research sought to amplify voices that are rarely represented in criminal justice research, with particular attention to the experiences of Roma women, whose lives are shaped by the intersection of ethnic discrimination, gender inequality, poverty, and involvement with probation services. The studies aimed to generate evidence supporting culturally responsive probation practices, strengthen institutional trust, and contribute to public awareness regarding the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Roma communities.

An important dimension of the research was the exploration of historical memory and its continuing influence on present-day experiences. Participants reflected on family histories of slavery, forced migration, deportations, assimilation policies, and other forms of institutional oppression that have shaped Roma communities across generations. In Romania, narratives frequently referred to the legacy of slavery, the deportations to Transnistria during the Second World War, and communist assimilation policies, while in Bulgaria participants recalled the long process of settlement, the assimilation measures implemented during the socialist period, and the "Revival Process" of the 1980s.

2. Methodological Framework

Both national studies adopted a common qualitative research design based on narrative approaches and life-history. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews constituted

the primary data collection method, complemented by participatory observation and thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke framework.

Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling, primarily through probation services, ensuring the inclusion of Roma probationers as well as close family members. Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by participants, including probation offices and private homes, creating safe environments that encouraged open discussion of sensitive experiences. Researchers also recorded observations regarding the interview context, emotional responses, and community dynamics.

The studies strictly followed ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, anonymity was guaranteed, and researchers applied the "Do No Harm" principle throughout the research process. Participants were informed that participation would have no impact on their probation supervision or legal status.

3. Participants

Romania

The Romanian research included 82 participants (46 men and 36 women) recruited from Ialomița, Ilfov, Constanța and Timiș counties, representing both urban and rural communities. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 94 years, reflecting considerable intergenerational diversity. The sample demonstrated severe socio-economic vulnerability: over half of participants (51%) reported having no formal education; 45 participants lived in rural areas and 37 in urban communities; educational disadvantage was closely associated with unemployment, poverty and limited access to public services.

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian study involved 81 participants (49 men and 32 women) interviewed in Byala Slatina, Pleven, Plovdiv and Sofia. Because male probationers substantially outnumber female probationers, researchers expanded recruitment to include women who were family members of probationers. Participants ranged from 19 to 86 years of age, with the majority living in peri-urban or rural communities. Early school leaving was widespread, employment was frequently informal or seasonal, and most family structures consisted of customary rather than legally registered marriages.

4. Main Findings

4.1 Identity and Cultural Diversity

The research demonstrates that Roma identity is highly diverse and context-dependent.

In Romania, participants frequently described their identity as an inherited characteristic linked to family history and tradition. While many expressed strong pride in their Roma identity, others sought to distance themselves from stereotypes by emphasizing education, employment, or what they described as becoming "Romanized." Identity was therefore constantly negotiated between preserving traditions and adapting to majority society.

In Bulgaria, identity appeared considerably more fluid. Participants often identified themselves simultaneously as Roma, Bulgarians, or Turks depending on their religious affiliation, neighbourhood, or local social context. Researchers also documented more than sixty Roma subgroups and increasing cultural changes associated with Protestant and Evangelical churches, which influence family relations, traditional practices and community leadership.

4.2 Gender and Intersectionality

Both studies identified Roma women as experiencing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination.

Romanian participants described how women carry primary responsibility for childcare, household management and preserving cultural traditions while simultaneously facing ethnic discrimination in education, healthcare and employment. Women wearing traditional clothing reported increased visibility in public spaces, making them frequent targets of prejudice and exclusion.

Bulgarian respondents highlighted persistent patriarchal norms that continue to shape girls' educational opportunities and life trajectories. Early school leaving, arranged marriages, concerns regarding female honour, and bride-price practices remain influential in some communities, contributing to early transitions into domestic roles and limiting women's access to education and employment.

4.3 Historical Memory and Migration

Historical memory remains central to contemporary Roma identity.

Romanian participants frequently referred to the legacy of slavery, deportations to Transnistria during the Second World War, communist assimilation policies, and the confiscation of family wealth. These historical experiences continue to shape perceptions of discrimination, mistrust of institutions, and intergenerational poverty.

Bulgarian participants demonstrated more fragmented historical memories. While some recalled forced assimilation during the "Revival Process" of the 1980s, others associated the socialist period with greater employment stability and social security. The

Bulgarian report also describes the long historical development of Roma communities from Ottoman times through socialist integration and post-socialist marginalisation.

Despite these differences, respondents in both countries consistently identified labour migration to Western Europe as an essential survival strategy that provides employment opportunities unavailable in their local communities while reducing daily exposure to discrimination.

4.4 Social Exclusion and Everyday Life

Participants described persistent structural disadvantages affecting nearly every aspect of daily life.

Across both countries, respondents reported: limited educational opportunities; unstable employment and informal labour; inadequate housing conditions; healthcare inequalities; residential segregation; poverty transmitted across generations.

Many participants explained that these disadvantages reinforce one another, creating cycles of exclusion that are difficult to escape without external institutional support.

4.5 Relationship with the Probation System

One of the most consistent findings concerns the distinction participants made between probation services and other criminal justice institutions. Probation officers were generally viewed positively. Participants from both countries highlighted respectful communication, equal treatment, and the supportive role of probation counsellors, who were often regarded as trusted professionals. Nevertheless, respondents also noted that mandatory reporting requirements occasionally conflicted with seasonal employment and labour migration opportunities abroad, creating additional economic hardship.

4.6 Discrimination and Resilience

Experiences of discrimination emerged across virtually every life domain, including education, employment, healthcare, housing and interactions with public authorities.

Participants described being rejected during job recruitment, experiencing segregated schooling, receiving unequal treatment within healthcare services, and encountering stereotypes in everyday social interactions. Some respondents coped by concealing their ethnic identity or avoiding situations where discrimination was anticipated.

Despite these challenges, the dominant narrative throughout both reports is one of resilience. Participants consistently identified education, vocational training, stable employment and respectful institutional treatment as the primary pathways towards

improving opportunities for future generations. They expressed a strong desire to be recognised as equal citizens, judged according to their individual abilities rather than ethnic stereotypes.

5. Conclusions

The comparative findings demonstrate that Roma communities in Romania and Bulgaria share many common experiences despite differing historical and institutional contexts. Persistent discrimination, educational disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion remain significant barriers to inclusion. At the same time, both studies reveal considerable resilience within Roma communities and identify probation services as one of the few public institutions consistently perceived as respectful and supportive.