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



ROMA INFLUENCERS NETWORK/2024-1-EL01-KA220-ADU-000247507



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National Report on Early Marriages and Early Motherhood in Roma Communities

Greece Report

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Roma communities

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I. Introduction

I.1. The Roma Influencers Network Project

The present report is integrated in the European Project Roma Influencers Network - breaking the circle of early marriages and early motherhood in Roma communities (Grant Agreement n. 2024-1-EL01-KA220-ADU-000247507) in the framework of the Programme ERASMUS+.

Roma Influencers Network project centres on early marriage and early motherhood in Roma communities and is focused on empowering and awareness raising of the Roma community, especially women and girls. The main purpose is to suggest ways to change behaviours and attitudes in order to overcome, reduce or eliminate the practice and its harmful impacts.

The Consortium of the project consists of 4 countries: Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Romania.

This national report is part of the WP2 – Breaking the circle of early marriages and early motherhood in Roma Communities, and in particular of the Activity 2.2. National research, on early marriages and early motherhood among Roma community, was carried out in the four different countries with CESIS, in Portugal, as team leader.

The aim of this report is to contribute to a better understanding of early marriage and early motherhood, namely among Roma women and girls in each partner country, outlining the legal framework and policies and the situation of Roma community.

This national report is related to **Greece**.

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1.2. Early marriage and early motherhood: Global concerns

Early marriage and early motherhood remain urgent global challenges. Both the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), along with other key research organizations such as the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Girls Not Brides, have extensively documented the causes and consequences related to these practices.

UNICEF (2023) defines child marriage as any formal marriage or informal union involving a child under the age of 18 and it estimates that approximately 12 million girls are married before reaching that age limit each year, many of whom become mothers shortly thereafter.

Early marriage and early motherhood are particularly prevalent in low- and middle-income countries, where gender inequality, poverty and lack of education combine to undermine the rights and futures of millions of girls. However, it also remains a problem in Europe, where it varies considerably between regions. Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Romania report higher rates of teenage births. For example, in 2021 Bulgaria had the highest teenage birth rate in Europe. If we consider the age between 10 and 14 years, the rate is 1.6‰ in Bulgaria and 1.45‰ in Romania. The rates increase when the age group 15-19 is considered: 38.7‰ and 33.89‰ respectively. 10.2‰ of all births in the country, while Romania reported that 12.3‰ of first births were to teenage mothers in 2015.

The same source indicates the following rates in Greece: 7.44‰ for the 15-19 age group; 0.48‰ for the 10-14 age group.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 years worldwide.

Due to their physical immaturity, adolescent mothers are at greater risk of life-threatening complications such as obstructed labour and obstetric fistula. Their children are also more likely to be born prematurely, with low birth weight or with neonatal health problems.

The consequences of early motherhood are not limited to health. UNICEF (2023) emphasises that early marriage often leads to the termination of a girl's education and the loss of her autonomy and economic opportunities. Girls are also often isolated from their peers, subjected to domestic violence and forced into lifelong dependency.

These observations are supported by evidence from the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) highlighting that early marriage is deeply embedded in social norms and economic insecurity, and stress the need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches that include education, community mobilisation and economic incentives for families. More recently, organizations such as Girls Not Brides (2020) further highlight the social and cultural drivers of child marriage. This organization identifies poverty, insecurity, and lack of educational access as major risk factors and calls for localized, culturally sensitive solutions.

In its State of World Population 2013 report, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) explores how adolescent pregnancy often reflects deep-seated gender inequalities (UNFPA, 2013). This in turn points to the need for structural change - changing the environment in which girls live, and the expectations placed on them - and the promotion of human and women's rights.

Collectively, these institutions and researchers converge on key conclusions: early marriage and early motherhood are driven by intersecting factors, including gender discrimination, poverty and social norms. The consequences are far-reaching, affecting girls' health, education, autonomy and future prospects. Effective solutions must

therefore be equally comprehensive - combining legal reform, education, access to health care, community engagement, and economic support.

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II. Framework on early marriage and early motherhood at a national level

II.1. Greek National Legal Framework

II. 1.1. About the concepts

In order to understand the concept of early marriage, it is important to understand the legal age limits.

Child marriage refers to any formal or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.

The Greek Civil Code defines the minimum age required for marriage. In this legal document, the limits coincide with the age of majority and is set at 18 years. However, persons under the age of 18 may marry with the consent of a competent court if there are "important reasons" for the marriage. However, the Civil Code does not specify what qualifies as such, so it is decided on a case-by-case basis.

Also, the Greek Civil Code defines the framework for a non-forced since it is written that marriage requires the agreement of the future spouses with a declaration which must be in person and without condition or deadline.

In short, while marriages of minors are generally prohibited and marriage should generally require the consent of both spouses, underage girls are not adequately protected from forced marriage, as those who have custody of the minor girl can circumvent this specific provision.

Early marriage forced, marriage and early motherhood are related phenomena in practice, but there is no clear definition of early motherhood.

II.1.2. Law and policy in Greece

II.1.2.1. International Conventions and orientations

Like other countries, Greece has adopted several international guidelines in the field of child protection. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a fundamental document and Greece was one of the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through Law 2101 of 2 December 1992.

Greece also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict on 22 October 2003; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on 22 February 2008.

The Istanbul Convention was signed in Greece on May 11, 2011. However, its ratification and the implementing Law came much later on 2018 by Law 4531/2018. This is the first binding legal text that recognizes gender-based violence.

Most directly related to the theme of the Roma Influencers project, Greece co-sponsored the following Human Rights Council resolutions: i) the 2013 procedural resolution on child, early and forced marriage; ii) the 2015 resolution on child, early and forced marriage; iii) the 2017 resolution recognising the need to address child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian contexts; iv) the 2019 resolution on the consequences of child marriage; v) the 2021 resolution on child, early and forced marriage in times of

crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic; vi) and the 2023 resolution on ending and preventing forced marriage.

In 2014, Greece also signed a joint statement at the Human Rights Council calling for a resolution on child marriage and co-sponsored the 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022 UN General Assembly resolutions on child, early and forced marriage.

Greece is committed to ending child, early and forced marriage by 2030, in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals: Eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Finally, Greece ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1983, which requires states to ensure free and full consent to marriage.

At the London Girl Summit in July 2014, the Greek government signed a charter committing to end child marriage by 2020.

II. 1.2.2. National legislative framework

Inspired by the CRC, Law 2101/1992 defines children as all human beings under the age of 18, regardless of sex, origin, religion or disability. This law is guided by the same four fundamental principles as the CRC: i) non-discrimination (Article 2); the best interests of the child (Article 3); iii) survival, development and protection (Article 6); iv) freedom of expression and participation (Article 12).

Law 2909/2001 established the National Observatory for the Rights of the Child, which is attached to the General Secretariat for Youth of the Ministry of Education and

Religious Affairs. The purpose of the Observatory is to promote and monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Greece. Its founding law states that its tasks include "the organisation of a documentation centre for the collection and processing of statistical, legislative, jurisprudential, bibliographical and other relevant data at national and international level", international and national dialogue with all bodies active in the field of the implementation of children's rights, the promotion of scientific research in general on social issues relating to childhood, the presentation of an annual action plan on the rights of minors and, finally, the drafting of the report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Law 4531/2018, which ratifies and implements the Istanbul Convention, is the first binding legal text in Greece that recognises gender-based violence.

Subsequently, other regulations have been introduced to implement the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, namely:

- Strengthening criminal legislation to address crimes committed against women (genital mutilation, stalking, "honour crimes").
- Adoption of a new definition of rape in the Criminal Code. Article 336 retains the previous definition of the crime of rape, which refers to forcing another person to have or tolerate sexual intercourse or another immoral act by means of physical force or the threat of great and immediate danger, and adds a new offence based on lack of consent.
- Law 3500/2006 on domestic violence is amended, with the aim of its broader and more effective application.

- Law 3811/2009 on the Greek Compensation Authority will be amended in order to facilitate victims' access to the compensation provided for in the said law.
- Law 2168/1993 on weapons will be amended so that permits will not be issued to those who have been prosecuted or convicted for domestic violence offences.
- Foreigners who are victims of domestic violence and come to the competent authorities to file the relevant complaint are protected from return.
- The General Secretariat for Gender Equality is designated as the monitoring authority of the Convention.

As mentioned above, the Greek Civil Code defines the conditions for a legal marriage. According to Article 1350, marriage requires the consent of the future spouses, which must be given in person and without conditions or time limits. The Civil Code, in the same article, also sets an age limit of 18 years for the celebration of marriage, providing for an exception for important reasons, which it does not specify, with the permission of the court. In short, although marriage for minors is generally prohibited, it can be authorised with the permission of the court for important reasons, which can be anything, such as the pregnancy of the minor or the imminent threat to the honour of the family of the minor girl, for example in the case of extramarital affairs. In this case, however, underage girls are not adequately protected from forced marriage, as those who have custody of the minor girl can circumvent this specific provision.

Greece has a dual legal system, with the Muslim minority in the Western Thrace region of Greece allowed to apply Sharia law. Muftis are appointed by the Greek state and have jurisdiction over marriage. In these cases, child marriage is allowed if a girl is pregnant or with parental consent. Under Hanafi law, a girl or boy must reach puberty before they can marry. Girls under the age of 15 require parental consent to marry. Hanafi marriages are legally recognised under Greek and civil law. In Greece, forced marriage is not

treated as a separate offence, but can be punished in the context of other offences such as rape, physical and psychological violence, voluntary or involuntary abduction and crimes of honour.

During its review in 2024, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the prevalence of child marriage, particularly among the Roma and Muslim minority communities in Thrace. In Thrace, community-elected muftis have jurisdiction over Muslim marriages and perform marriages for girls under the age of 15 with parental consent. The Committee recommended that the government remove all exceptions for marriage under the age of 18, address the root causes of child marriage, encourage reporting of child marriage and provide support services to victims of child marriage, kidnapping and honour crimes.

In its 2022 review, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the government raise awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage, particularly among the Roma community and the Muslim minority in Thrace and encourage the reporting of child marriages in order to establish protection systems for victims.

II.1.3. National policies and projects covering early marriage and early motherhood

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child led to the creation of a system for the protection of children and the promotion of their rights, based on the principle of non-discrimination and localised, with the establishment of a Juvenile Protection Team (OPA) in each municipality. It also redefined the responsibilities of the Ombudsman and extended his mandate to include the protection and promotion of children's rights.

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With the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the Greek authorities are taking several positive policy measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, including the establishment of shelters and counselling centres that provide essential services to women victims of gender-based violence.

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2025 is structured around four priority axes, each of which focuses on a specific thematic dimension of gender equality policy: 1) Preventing and combating gender-based and domestic violence. 2) Equal participation of women in the labour market. 3) Equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership. 4) Integrating the gender perspective into sectoral policies.

Among the priorities of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality are references to early marriage and early motherhood, as well as to Roma women, namely:

- Priority Axis 1/ Objective 1.4: Combating other forms of violence/ Measure 1.4.2: Preventing and combating stalking, FGM, early and forced marriages and Action 1.4.2. - Informing the Romani population about early and forced marriages and the provisions of Greek law, as well as the rights of the child.
- Priority Axis 4/Objective 4.2: Strengthening the intersectoral approach to gender issues/action 4.2.3. Work with other ministries to improve the legal framework for family law, in particular the provisions of the Civil Code, which still contain provisions contrary to the constitutional principle of gender equality (e.g. Article 1350 of the Civil Code on the age of marriage, Article 1505 on children's surnames) [Ministry of Justice].
- Priority 4/ Objective 4.3: Improving the situation of women exposed to multiple discrimination and eliminating their social exclusion/ Measure 4.3.3. - Elimination of social exclusion of Romani women o Registration of Romani women's

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organisations for continuous information on the rights of immigrant women and on the bodies to which they can turn for help - Cooperation of the network of structures with branches of community centres of first level local authorities for Romani people, for referral of cases of gender-based or domestic violence. - Awareness-raising campaign through the production of relevant leaflets, websites and TV spots to reduce school dropout among Roma girls. - Preparation, in cooperation with Greek Public Employment Office, of training and lifelong learning programmes for the female workforce targeting Romani women and linking them directly to the labour market; - Awareness-raising campaigns in Romani communities on the consequences of early/forced marriages; - Participation in the National Strategy for the Social Integration of Romani People.

In addition, the National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2021-2030, which reflects the principles of the Active Social State, aims to promote development-oriented policies to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion. Based on the EU's fundamental values for a society of equal treatment, rights and opportunities for all National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2021-2030 focuses on social inclusion, smooth coexistence, building mutual trust and equal participation of Roma in the social, political, economic and cultural fabric of the country. It focuses on creating the conditions for the active participation of Roma in society as Greek and European citizens and for the equal exercise of their rights and duties in their personal, social and professional lives. At its core is the essential protection of the fundamental rights of Roma through integrated interventions to promote socio-economic inclusion, active citizenship and the elimination of conditions of social exclusion and discrimination.

In particular, National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2021-2030 aims to effectively address the multiple forms of deprivation experienced by Roma and to promote their integrated integration into the social, economic, political and cultural

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fabric of the country through targeted interventions in the housing, health, education and employment sectors, as well as strengthening access to mainstream social inclusion policies. Combating spatial segregation, improving living conditions, housing rehabilitation and access to basic social goods are key strategic objectives. Special emphasis will also be placed on strengthening and upgrading the skills of Roma, especially the most vulnerable groups such as women and young people, with a view to their active participation in local society. In addition, the establishment of realistic and measurable indicators for monitoring and evaluating Roma social inclusion policies and actions will be promoted.

An assessment report on the Member States' National Roma Strategy Frameworks (NRSFs) was carried out by the European Commission in January 2023, which highlighted that the key objectives, targets and actions contained in the EU Strategic Framework on Roma and the Council Recommendation are reflected to varying degrees in the NRSFs. In order for the NRSFs to bring about the desired changes by 2030, it will be necessary to develop and maintain strong partnerships between all relevant stakeholders, to respond effectively to country-specific challenges, to monitor progress closely and to adapt and update the NRSFs as necessary.

In parallel with and contributing to National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2021-2030, several initiatives are being designed and implemented mainly by women's and children's organisations and other NGOs through European projects, the Erasmus+ programme and/or other local or regional projects. A project entitled Early Marriage Network aims to promote cooperation between child protection, health and education, justice and police systems to coordinate their activities to combat early marriage in Roma communities, using a child-centred approach, and to raise awareness among the various target groups in Roma communities in order to change their attitudes and behaviour towards early marriage.

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II. 2. What it is known about early marriage and early motherhood

II. 2.1. What figures are saying

According to the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund, Greece had an adolescent (10/14-year-olds) birth rate of 0.48‰ in 2021. This rate is one of the highest among the EU countries. Greece improves its relative position when looking at the 15-19 age group, with a rate of 7.44‰, placing it in the group of countries with rates below 10‰.

For its part, the Hellenic Statistical Authority states that the number of marriages under the age of 19 by sex in the general population in the last 5 years is 2,401 for women and 590 for men.

The number of births to new mothers under the age of 19 was 10,779.

For the number of low-birth-weight children and the age of the mother, a request had to be made to the Hellenic Statistical Authority as the survey was carried out but has not been published due to personal data. According to the data provided, for the years 2019-2023, the number of births of children with low birth weight (less than 999 grams and up to 1,499 grams) by mothers under the age of 20 is 123.

According to UNICEF, 37,058 marriages involving at least one person under the age of 19 took place between 2000 and 2021, while 84% of minors who married between 2000 and 2021 were girls. Of these, 835 marriages involved at least one person under the age of 15. It should be noted that almost one third of child marriages took place in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

II. 2.2. About the reality of early marriage and early motherhood

In Greece, child marriage is perceived as acceptable in certain communities. There is a widespread social belief that child marriage is not an issue in the country.

According to research carried out by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2022), the phenomenon of early marriage affects not only countries in the non-Western world, but also EU Member States, mainly due to Roma communities residing in the Union, but also Muslim communities who have arrived in European territories as refugees. For this reason, the phenomenon is also strongly observed in our country, which is the place of residence of a large number of Roma, while, as is logical due to its geographical location, it is also the place of residence of many refugees and immigrants. Greece also differs from the rest of the European countries in that, due to special conditions and regulations in the field of family law, the problem of underage marriages can also be found in the circles of the minority of Greeks of Muslim origin in Western Thrace, as has already been mentioned.

While noting that children, regardless of their age, can marry after court approval as an exception under the Civil Code or under the jurisdiction of the Mufti, the Committee urges the State party to remove all exceptions in the law that allow children under the age of 18 to marry.

The main causes of child marriage are poverty according to the International Center for Research on Women, low levels of education, gender discrimination in a patriarchal society, social perceptions of family 'honour', religious perceptions, and inadequate legal protection linked to the failure of governments to protect children from child marriage. Finally, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic is another factor contributing to the increase in the phenomenon.

The consequences of child marriage are devastating. Girls married before the age of 15 are 50% more likely to be physically and psychologically abused by their husbands than women who marry as adults. Furthermore, the lack of education and information on contraception in general, as well as the refusal of men to use protection during sexual intercourse with their legal spouses, leads to the onset of early unwanted pregnancies at a very young age. This leads to an increase in the mortality rate of pregnant women, mothers and their children.

On the other hand, child marriage also affects mental health. Physical and sexual abuse combined with isolation and deprivation of vital freedoms in childhood lead to psychological problems such as marginalisation, fear, humiliation, depression, loneliness and suicidal tendencies.

Another important consequence is the financial and psychological dependence of the young wife on her husband. The large age difference that sometimes exists between couples in such marriages, combined with the lack of education, leads to inequality between the spouses, the inability of the girl to make decisions and find a job, and thus the inability to become independent, depriving her of the possibility of escaping forced marriage. In these situations, girls experience marginalisation and social stigma, while at the same time facing significant survival difficulties due to a lack of financial resources and support. This situation perpetuates the phenomena of domestic and gender-based violence, stereotypes and inequalities in subsequent generations. It is therefore an endless, vicious circle of the phenomenon from generation to generation, which irreparably affects the fundamental rights of girls, as recognised in a multitude of legal texts, binding or non-binding, international, EU and national.

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II. 3. Roma communities in Greece

II.3.1 General characterisation of Roma communities

Roma living in Greece are mainly Greek citizens and citizens of other Member States of the European Union. Greek Roma are historically an integral part of the Greek population, subject to the constitution and laws of the Greek state and enjoy all the individual, social and political rights guaranteed to Greek citizens. As Greek citizens, Roma are not registered on the basis of their cultural identity. However, due to their specific socio-economic characteristics, some of them are identified, on the basis of legal or regulatory provisions, as: a special social group; a group living in camps or settlements with characteristics of social exclusion; a vulnerable group with specific cultural characteristics; a vulnerable social group; a population of marginalised special social groups.

Statistics on the number of Roma in Greece are difficult to obtain. Existing national surveys and inventories, as well as European surveys and assessments, provide the framework for targeting the implementation needs of strategic co-funded interventions in recent decades.

, a figure also taken into account by the European Commission in its recent Communication "A Union of Equality - EU Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma (2020)", which places our country among the EU Member States with significant Roma populations.

The Council of Europe estimates that there are an average of 175,000 Roma in Greece (representing 1.55% of the country's total population) (2014) and 265.000 ((representing 2.47% of the country's total population) (2020) appearing in Analysis of European Commission about EU funding for Roma integration 2021-2023. This number

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The latest Roma mapping, conducted by the General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Fight against Poverty – National Contact Point for Roma Inclusion in 2021 in cooperation with the Municipal authorities all over Greece resulted that there are 462 Roma living areas, including 266 settlements and 196 scattered households (individual or in groups). The mapping demonstrates that approximately 117,495 Roma resided in Greece in 2022, accounting for approximately 1.13% of the total population. A typology based on living and housing conditions divide the areas where Roma reside into three types: Type I concerns segregated settlements characterized by severe deprivation (with 77 such areas identified), Type II refers to "mixed areas" characterized by mixed housing (shacks and houses) and poor infrastructure (with 122 such areas identified) and Type III which refers to neighbourhoods inside the urban fabric with 67 such areas identified). In addition Roma people also reside in Scattered households (individual or in groups) all over the country (with 196 such areas identified).

A true understanding of the living conditions of this population comes up against the obstacles of their own identification. However, it can be said that, despite the measures taken in recent years, this particular social group suffers from multiple forms of discrimination and deprivation, as well as spatial and socio-economic exclusion in different areas. For Greece, according to the survey conducted by the FRA entitled "Roma Survey 2021-Roma in 10 European countries", the main findings are as follows:

- Poverty and social exclusion: On average, 96% of Roma in Greece were at risk of poverty (people at risk of poverty are all those with an equivalised current monthly disposable household income less than the twelfth of Eurostat's national at-risk-

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of-poverty threshold (below 60% of median equivalised income). On average, 98% of Roma children younger than 18 lived in households at risk of poverty. On average, 94% of Roma in Greece surveyed lived in households facing severe material deprivation (unexpected expenses; a one-week annual holiday away from home; a meal involving meat, chicken or fish every second day; the adequate heating of a dwelling; durable goods such as a washing machine; a colour television; a telephone; a car; or being confronted with payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments). On average, 87% of Roma children live in a household that cannot afford to pay for four of the nine items in the material deprivation index.

- Education: 32% of children aged 3 to the start of compulsory primary education attend early childhood education and care. 16% of 20–24-year-olds have completed at least upper secondary education. Segregation affects 34% of children aged 6-15 who attend schools where all or most pupils are Roma.
- Employment: 33% of people aged 20-64 reported their main activity status as 'paid work' (including full-time, part-time, ad hoc, self-employment, occasional work or work in the last four weeks). The employment gap between men and women is 38 percentage points on average in 2021. 58% of young people aged 16-24 are currently 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET).
- Health: In Greece, Roma women live 9.7 years less than women in the general population, and Roma men live 8.8 years less than men in the general population. On average, 74% of Roma in Greece report having health insurance in 2021.
- Housing: 68% of Roma households experience housing deprivation (dwelling is too dark, has problems with damp, has no shower/bathroom in the dwelling or has no (indoor) toilet). 94% of people living in a household do not have the

minimum number of rooms according to Eurostat's definition of overcrowding. 7% of people living in households without a tap in the dwelling.

- Discrimination: 53% of respondents felt discriminated against in key areas of life because they were Roma. 41% of respondents experienced at least one form of hate harassment because of being Roma. 3% of respondents have been physically attacked because they are Roma. 6% of respondents reported the most recent incident of discrimination because of being Roma. 20% of respondents who felt discriminated against because of being Roma when in contact with school authorities (as a parent/guardian or as a student). 52% of respondents who felt discriminated against when looking for a job because they were Roma. 22% of respondents who have felt discriminated against in accessing health services because they are Roma. 57% of respondents who have felt discriminated against when looking for housing because they are Roma.

According to the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2021 - 2030, carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and the Combating against Poverty in 2021, the following findings are highlighted:

- In the field of education, the dominant phenomena among Roma are: adult illiteracy; non-attendance at pre-school level; low enrolment rates and late start of participation in primary education; dropping out before completing compulsory schooling; and low participation rates in secondary education. The low level of Roma participation in education is the result of a combination of social, educational and cultural factors, such as the movement of families for work, the inability of parents to transport children to school, the presence of underage parents, poverty, the victimisation of Roma children at school due to racist attitudes, the lack of appropriate support for Roma pupils and their families, and

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the illiteracy of parents. Another important barrier to their participation in pre-primary education is language. Preschool Roma children often speak a largely Romani dialect, which makes it difficult for them to attend nursery schools or kindergartens where the teachers speak Greek.

- The poor health of the Roma is linked to social determinants of health and to discrimination and barriers to access to health services, such as unhealthy living conditions, low levels of education, lack of knowledge about disease prevention, lack of knowledge about the content and procedures for claiming benefits, geographical isolation and inability to physically access services, lack of information, and language and communication barriers.
- Increased difficulties for women: Marginalisation and loss of educational and employment opportunities affect Roma women in particular, due to traditional stereotypes that encourage early marriage.
- Digital exclusion and inequalities due to lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICT), which makes it difficult for them to carry out their transactions with the state (e.g. applying for benefits; enrolling in school; applying for a job; participating in distance learning).
- Seasonal employment or professional activities separate from formal market work, mainly in the agricultural or commercial sectors. However, these traditional occupations are in decline, which is another obstacle to integration into the labour market, along with a lack of educational or vocational qualifications, discrimination and barriers to finding work.
- Roma in Greece are treated with negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes by a large percentage of municipal employees, teachers and health workers, which

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has a negative impact on their access to necessary services, while they are generally considered as 'people to avoid'.

- Problems due to the lack of certificates (e.g. birth certificate, identity card, etc.) and/or the lack of registration in the municipal registers.

II.3.2 Early marriage and early motherhood among Roma communities in Greece

Most early marriages within Roma communities remain unregistered, resulting in a lack of qualitative and quantitative data to fully understand the situation and inform effective policy making. In addition, Greece has no data available in the UNICEF Data Warehouse, where countries are reported on the "percentage of girls aged 15-19 who are currently married or in a union".

Having said this, it is important to note that early marriage and early motherhood are not specific to Roma communities. The survey National Mapping of Settlements and Roma Population (2021), conducted by the General Secretariat for Social Solidarity & Fight against Poverty of the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, points precisely in this direction. The survey was carried out among local authorities and its results indicate that the image of early marriage conveyed by the municipalities is that it is a phenomenon that concerns the entire population and that it is extremely intense.

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According to the responses to all the questionnaires, and in proportion to the population to which the response relates, early marriage occurs in 97% of the total Roma population. A similar picture of 97% was observed in the population sample used for the age groups.

Comparing the rates of observation of the phenomenon separately in settlements and dispersed areas, the situation is slightly better in dispersed areas, where the percentage of the population where the phenomenon is strongly observed is 76%, i.e. lower than in settlements, where it is 91%. At the same time, the proportion of responses that the phenomenon is slightly observed in the dispersed areas - 20% compared to 9% in the settlements - shows that, overall, the phenomenon of early marriage is still intense in the dispersed areas, at approximately the same level, but in a slightly less intense situation.

It should be noted that the above percentages reflect the estimated picture that the local authority has, without quantitative and qualitative measurement criteria having been set.

In addition, there are assessments, mainly from local and/or regional authorities, academic institutions, European projects, students and NGOs conducting research on the subject.

The results indicate that, at least in Roma communities, 39% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 12% before the age of 15.

In many places, girls become mothers because they have limited educational and employment prospects. In such societies, marriage and motherhood are often the best of limited options.

Child marriage, combined with early motherhood, is a clear violation of human rights, especially the rights of children. Of course, this phenomenon affects both adolescent girls and boys, but according to studies, globally it seems to affect girls more.

For Greek Roma, marriage is a very important event, both as a ceremony and as a rule. As an institution, it ensures the continuity of the group and the achievement of lifelong alliances (economic, social, even political) between two extended families, and is the pre-eminent place for the reproduction of ideology, since it is here that young people in particular are introduced to the unwritten codes of values and community rules of conduct.

The difficult living conditions of the Roma result in increased infant mortality and low life expectancy. This reality "accelerates" all life-related activities, including marriage and reproduction.

This also explains the fact that marriages take place at a relatively young age and that the number of children in Roma families is quite high. In addition, the preservation of their collective "we" requires marriage at a very young age, before the Roma are influenced by non-Roma peer groups as teenagers.

It is extremely rare in Roma society to find single men after the age of 30, and it is even rarer for them to be women.

For example, research shows that even when parents send their children to school, they are they must get marry as soon they reach of 12 and 18 years old, with the result that many Roma children are forced to drop out of education.

Otherwise, they risk remaining single, and the stigma is a burden on the family, as a woman who has not married has failed to fulfil what Roma communities consider to be

the basic human mission, which is none other than marriage, and is therefore considered to have a 'bit' or to be 'unlucky'.

This concept is deeply rooted in Roma society and culture, with the result that underage girls themselves have adopted it and prioritise marriage, even seeking early marriage themselves.

II.3.3 Pathways for social intervention

Based on the knowledge gained from both research and intervention work, also from KLIMAKA experience, with the Roma population, the following guidelines should guide the fight against early marriage and early motherhood:

- Continue to raise awareness among members of the Roma community about the harmful consequences of child marriage, the importance of education, adequate health care, women's rights and gender equality through workshops, field activities, various events, etc.
- Continue to raise young people's awareness of alternative ways of building their future and personal development and increase their motivation to study and attend school regularly. Raise awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage on girls' physical and mental health and well-being.

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- Raising media awareness of child marriage, with the aim of promoting a more sensitive and human rights-based approach when reporting.
- Identifying and promoting positive examples from the Roma community, raising young Roma's awareness of different life options and models, and increasing their freedom of choice.
- Strengthen the awareness and capacity of local Roma organisations, Roma activists, educational assistants and health mediators to be actively involved in the prevention of child marriage, but also to respond to the occurrence of child marriage by reporting it to relevant institutions.
- Increase opportunities for Roma children to participate in more activities available to their peers through various organised events.
- Continue efforts to improve institutional cooperation, networking and regular communication among all relevant authorities, as well as the implementation and improvement of existing cooperation mechanisms to prevent and eliminate child marriages through the organisation of round tables, debates, expert meetings, regular exchange of information by e-mail or regular meetings at local level.
- Conduct training and awareness-raising for representatives of all relevant institutions on the issue of child marriage and the role of each institution in the process of preventing and responding to child marriage.
- In particular, work to strengthen cooperation between social welfare centres and educational institutions through joint meetings and discussions on roles and responsibilities, establishing protocols for cooperation, ensuring timely feedback and individualised approaches to the risk of child marriage.

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- Ensure that accurate records of child marriages are kept by social welfare centres, but also by all other authorities that come into contact with this phenomenon.
- Make available sustainable State funding for targeted prevention programs on child marriage addressing particularly the most vulnerable populations.
- Undertake comprehensive research to understand the prevalence, trends and factors contributing to early marriage.
- Strengthen efforts at the national level to improve legislation as well as the practice of institutions, including the police and judiciary, to address the issue of child marriage as a human rights violation and not as part of Roma tradition.
- Integrate the issue of child marriage into local strategies and plans, and into the work of local bodies and councils.
- Provide additional measures and services tailored to the needs of beneficiaries in order to prevent and eliminate child marriage.
- Supporting Roma girls in primary school through mentoring and scholarships to prevent them from dropping out and getting married.
- Provide education professionals with the knowledge to prevent and combat child marriage.
- Change the laws and raise the age of marriage to 18 without exception.
- Encourage the reporting of child marriage and establish protection schemes for victims.

III. Listening Roma people – Field work research with Roma women on early marriage and early motherhood

In addition to the legal and policy framework of the subject, this national report also presents findings gathered directly from Roma women through interviews. The primary aim of these interviews was to gather insights that help describe and analyse the practice of early marriage and early motherhood within Roma communities as it is foreseen in the project. These conversations provided valuable perspectives on the consequences of these practices, considering the various dimensions of women's lives.

In general, according to the evaluation of all partners of the Project, the interview process was satisfactory/very satisfactory and went as expected. The tools used were also evaluated positively.

III.1. The Roma Influencers Network Research Methodology

In Greece, Klimaka team conducted a total of 54 interviews with Roma women. The target group consisted of Roma women aged 18 and over who were either married and/or had children. In order to reach this number, purposive sampling was the main method used to select participants. In addition, snowball sampling was used in some cases, where interviewees were asked to suggest other Roma women who might be willing to participate.

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Efforts were made to include women from different communities and neighbourhoods to reflect a wide range of experiences and contexts. Klimaka, as each project partner, used the most effective approach to identify and reach Roma women in their respective countries. Throughout the interview process, the principles of non-discrimination, privacy and anonymity were strictly adhered to. To create a more comfortable and trusting environment for the respondents, all interviews were conducted by women.

Before and during the interviews, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the interview, how the data would be used, and their rights—including the right to skip any question or to end the interview at any time. The time and/or location of each interview were arranged in advance in consultation with the respondent.

A consent form, compliant with national data protection legislation, was signed by both the interviewer and the interviewee. In Greece these interviews took place between December 2024 and February 2025.

III. 2. Characterisation of the participants in the interviews

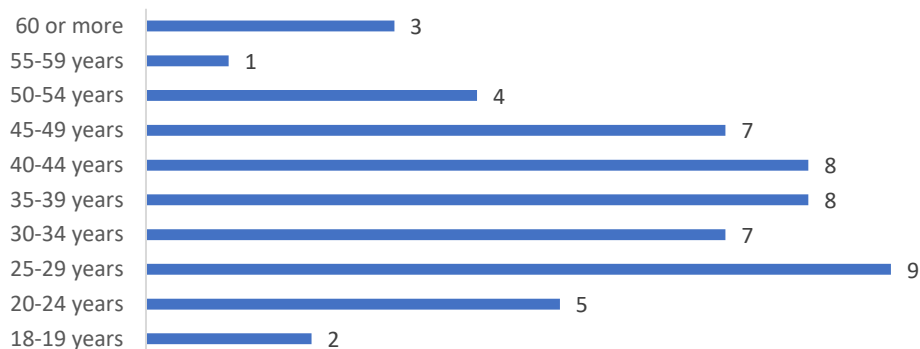
As mentioned above, a total of 54 interviews were conducted with Roma women in Greece. The ages of the women interviewed show a wide range, but nevertheless it can be said that more than 60 per cent are concentrated in the 25-44 age group.

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Figure 1 - Age group of the Roma women interviewed (Absolut numbers)



A total of 40 of these women (74%) live with their husbands/partners. Of these, 30 women (75%) live only with their husbands/partners (with or without children) and no other relatives; 4 (10%) live with their own parents (with or without children) in addition to their husbands/partners; and 6 (15%) live with their husband and in-laws (with or without children).

10 women (18.5%) live alone with their children; 3 women live with other relatives and children; only one woman lives alone.

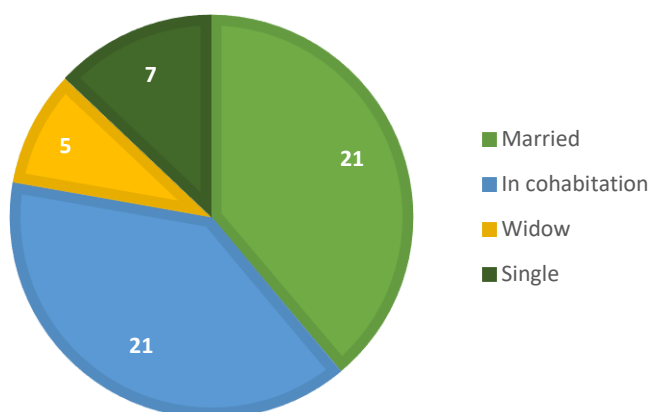
Regarding their living conditions:

- Most respondents (35 - 64.8%) live in urban areas. The rest live in more isolated areas, both urban (28) and rural (7).
- Almost all Roma women surveyed live in highly deprived housing and/or areas (50 - 92.6%). Four of them live in overcrowded housing according to the national typology.
- As a result, the type of housing is mostly a precarious house in shantytowns, slums or degraded settlements (37 women -68.5%) and 17 (31.5%) are in a

flat/house in similar conditions to the general population, in a rented or owned flat/house.

The information collected on marital status shows the importance of being married or living as a couple: 21 are living with their partner and 21 are married. There are also five widows and seven single people.

Figure 2 - Marital status of the Roma women interviewed (Absolut numbers)



Close to 50% (22) also had a religious ceremony and/or a civil ceremony but for 25 neither of these types of celebration took place.

II. 3. What women say about (early) marriage¹

In terms of how the married (or cohabiting) Roma respondents met their husbands or partners, a total of 27 (57.4%) referred to a family arrangement and seven women (14.9%) knew them from childhood. At school and at someone else's wedding were

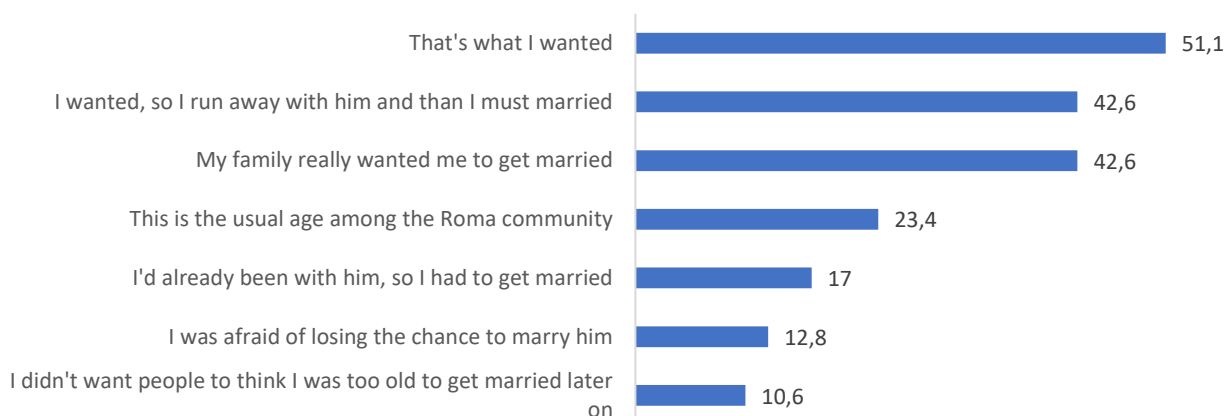
¹ Only responses from married women (including widows) or in cohabitation, i.e. 47 women, are included in this section.

From the figure below it can be seen that most of the Roma women interviewed married/came together while they were minors, which means that if it was an official marriage, these women would need a court order according to Greek law. In fact, 37 women (79%) married or started living with a partner under the age of 18, and 15 of them (31.9%) even under the age of 15. The most common situation is that of those who married between the ages of 15 and 17 (22 women - 46.8%).

Age Group	Number of People
< 15 years	15
15-17 years	22
18-20 years	9
25 or more years	1

The women's willingness (24 women- 51%) is the main reason given for their age at marriage or cohabitation. The desire to marry also underlies situations of running away (when not forced), which is the second most common reason for getting married or having a civil partnership recognised (20 women – 42.6%). In most cases, running also means being with their partners before the officialization of the union had married because of it (8 - 17%). The family's wish for these women to marry is also behind about half (20 women - 42.6%) of the situations. Also mentioned by 11 women (23.4%) is the fact that marriage at an early age is very common in Roma communities.

Figure 4 - Reasons for marrying at this age (%)²



However, there was no consensus among the women interviewed as to whether the age of marriage was the most appropriate. In fact, 32 of the Roma women interviewed (68.1%) would wait a little longer to get married. This answer was mainly given by those who married at the youngest age (up to 17 years).

On the other hand, almost 19% (9) of the respondents said that they would marry at the same age. Only five women would choose to marry at the youngest age.

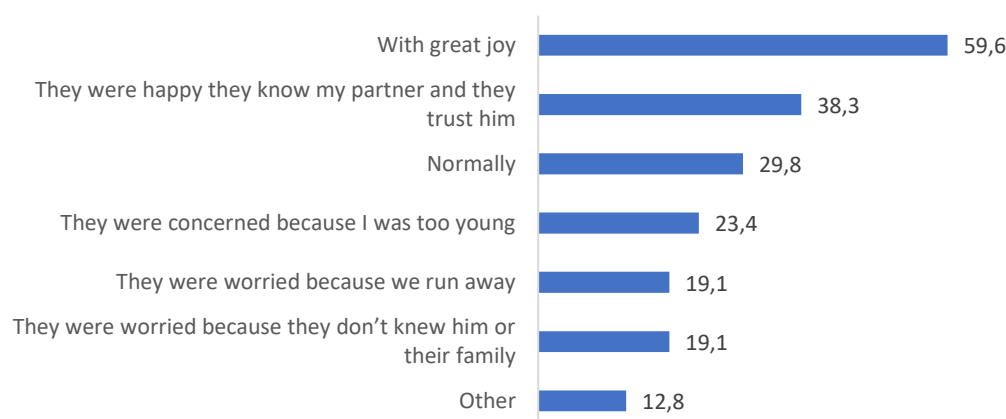
The marriages of these women elicited different reactions from their families. In general, it can be said that there was mostly a good reaction to the marriage of their daughters. According to 28 women (59.6%), the reactions were joyful and happy because they already knew the boy (18 women - 38.3%). A normal reaction was also reported by 14 women (29.8%), meaning that the marriage/union was somehow expected and is part of the life of their communities.

However, the responses also revealed some concerns and inconsistencies. 11 women (23.4%) reported that their parents' concerns were due to their age at the time of marriage because they considered them too young; another six women (12.8%)

² Multiple answers.

mentioned that their family of origin did not know the boy and his family that well. Finally, nine (19.1%) said that the fact that they were running away was also a reason for concern.

Figure 5 - Family reactions to marriage (%)³



Before marriage, 28 (59.6%) of the Roma women interviewed lived with their parents and looked after the family and home. Only 10 (21.3%) were attending school and 9 (19.1%) had a paid job.

A large number of women respondents (37 women - 78.7%) were of the opinion that marriage changed their lives.

The opinions expressed about what has changed with marriage reveal a split between those who think that marriage has brought more freedom (17 women - 45.9%) and those who think that, on the contrary, marriage meant a reduction in freedom (13 women – 35%).

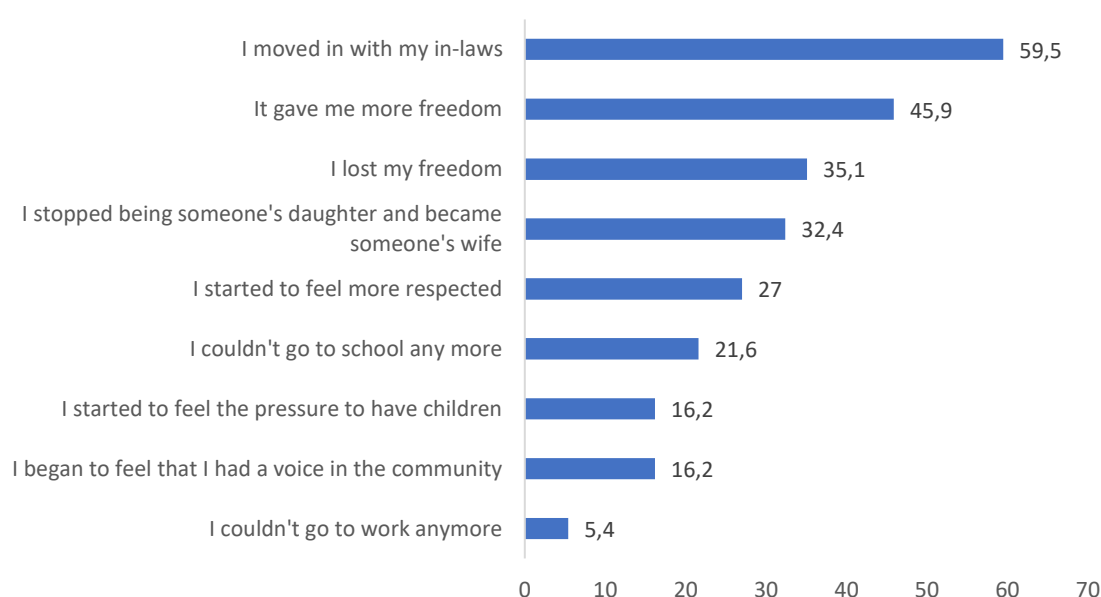
Realising a little more, the changing mostly mentioned by the interviews was the fact that they move with their in-laws (22 women - 59.5%) followed by a change of status,

³ Multiple answers.

where they no longer seen as someone's daughter but as someone's wife (12 women – 32.4%). This perception may represent a change, but the idea that a woman defines herself as belonging to someone seems to remain. It is also linked, at some point, to the idea that the transition to adulthood is made through marriage and that a married woman is seen in a more respectful way by the community (10 women - 27%), where she has more voice after marriage (6 women - 16.2%) and starts to feel the pressure to have children (6 women - 16.2%), since the role of a woman is not only to be a wife but a mother.

Although few in number, some women mentioned the restrictions that marriage had brought to their lives: stopping going to school (8 women - 21.6%); impossibility of going to work (2 women - 5.4%).

Figure 6 - Perceptions of changes in life after marriage (%)⁴



⁴ Multiple answers.

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III. 4. Motherhood

It is common knowledge among those working with Roma communities that motherhood plays a central and deeply respected role, serving as both a cultural cornerstone and a symbol of identity and continuity. In many Roma cultures, becoming a mother is seen as an important milestone, marking a woman's full participation in community life and reinforcing her status and influence within the family structure. Through motherhood, Roma women play a role not only in raising children, but also in preserving traditions and values across generations.

All Roma women respondents have children. A total of 26 women (48.1%) has 2 or 3 children and 17 (31.5%) have between 4 and 5. With 6 or more children are 17 women (13%) of the interviewees. Four women (7.4%) have only one child. This means that the average number of children is 3.7.⁵

As mentioned above, most of these women married at a very young age and consequently entered motherhood also at a very young age. The average age of these women when they have their first child is 18. It is important to put these figures into context by saying that in 2023, the average age of women giving birth to their first child in Greece was 32 years which reflects a significant increase over the last decades.⁶

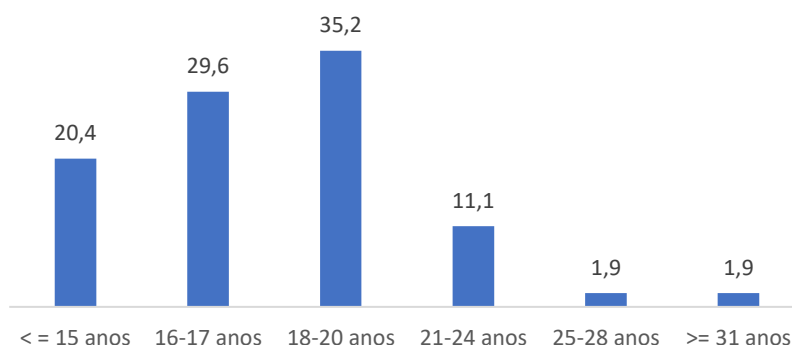
Putting this question in another way, as shown in the figure below, around 50% of first births took place when the women were under 18 years of age: 30% were between 16 and 17 years old; 20% were up to 15 years old. This means that out of the group of 54

⁵ According to OECD, the average number of children per woman in Greece is 1.33 (2023 data). See: [Greece GR: Total Fertility Rate: Children per Woman | Economic Indicators | CEIC](#)

⁶ [Experts sound alarm over plummeting fertility rate | eKathimerini.com.](#)

women surveyed, 27 had their first child when they were minors. Another 19 (35.2%) had their first child between the ages of 19 and 20.

Figure 7 - Age of women at the birth of their first child (%)

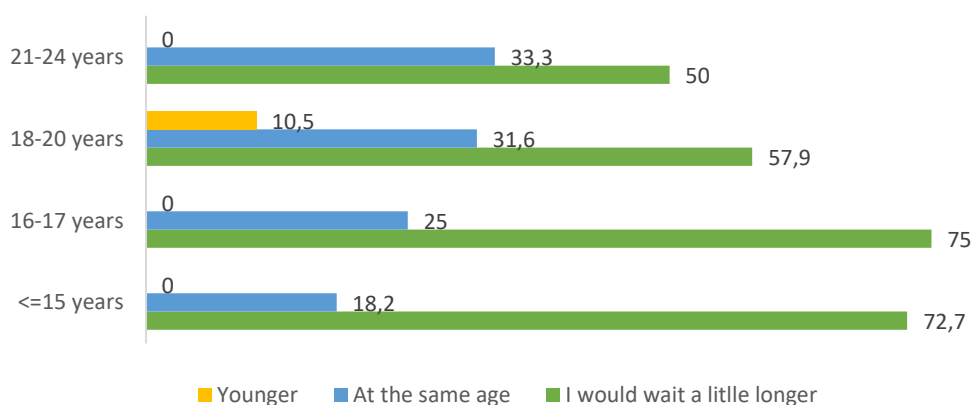


Most of the pregnancies were not planned (43 women -79.6%).

However, most women would like to wait a little longer before having their first child. In fact, 34 Roma respondents (63%) hold this opinion. There are still 15 (27.8%) who would choose the same age to have their children.

Those who had their children at a very young age - up to 17 years old - are the ones who would prefer to wait a little longer.

Figure 8 - Age preference for first-time motherhood by age group of Roma women (%)



For those who would prefer to wait a little longer, the most explicit reason is related to unpreparedness for motherhood, directly expressed by 22 women (59.5%). This is something that is also present in other answers, such as *Because I didn't know how to take care of my child properly, it was my husband's family who took care of my child* (7 women - 18.9% of those who wanted to wait a little longer to become a mother); *I was often told that I was not old enough to be a mother* (7 women - 18.9% of those who wanted to wait a little longer to become a mother).

A smaller number of women also expressed how motherhood had reduced their expectations of having a higher level of education, some even of going to university. Having more time to play and be a child was also mentioned.

Figure 9 - Reasons for wanting to have children later in life (%)



Other diverse opinions were expressed, such as wishing they had enjoyed married life more before having children and spending more time with their husbands:

- *'I would like to be alone with my husband for longer.'* Roma Woman, 44 years.

- *'I would like to live only with my husband a little longer and know him.'* Roma Woman, 34 years.

Others described motherhood as being very demanding in terms of finances, time and energy:

- *'It's a lot of work: 'I was tired from work. I couldn't handle motherhood.'* Roma Woman, 71 years.
- *'Financially, the pressure was great.'* Roma Woman, 39 years.
- *'I was alone. I had to work a lot.'* Roma Woman, 40 years.

There were a total of three women who mentioned health problems related to pregnancy as a reason for waiting to become a mother.

Traditionally, in Roma communities, the birth of a child is not just a private family affair, but a communal event that strengthens social bonds.⁷ Therefore a child's birth is a great event, and the reaction of the families is, in general, very positive.

This idea is reflected in the majority of opinions of Greek Roma women who mentioned the reaction of great happiness (43 women - 79.6%) of their family to their pregnancy. Eleven cases (20.4%) mentioned their family's offer of support at this particular stage.

But some responses also show concern that the woman is too young to become a mother and/or that pregnancy may have health consequences.

⁷ See: Rozvitok Human Rights Foundation. (2017). *Romani Customs and Traditions: Birth*. Retrieved from <https://rozvitok.org/en/romani-customs-and-traditions-birth/>.

Figure 10 – Reaction of the family to the pregnancy (%)⁸

In this sense, 45 women (83%) said that they received help after the birth mainly from their own families, especially from their mothers (34 women - 75.6%). Traditionally, having a child is a "woman's thing", so when 30 women (66.7%) mentioned help from their husbands, they were also expressing a change in practice. Men's families were also referred by 28 women (62.2%), which may be related to the couple staying in the husband's family home, but it is also important to note that 16.7% of respondents (9) had no help after the birth of their child.

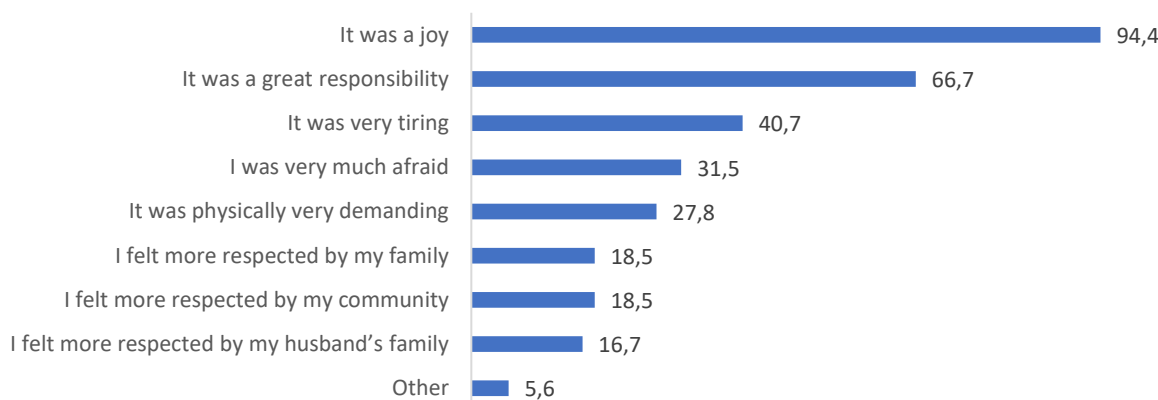
⁸ Multiple answers.

III. 5. Became a mother - feelings changes

For the group of women interviewed, motherhood appears to be a joy - almost all Roma women interviewed (51 - 94.4%) mentioned it. But it is a joy that also brings responsibilities (36 women mentioned this). The transition to adulthood through marriage and motherhood is expressed in the increased respect from their own families (10 women), from the community (10 women) and from their husbands' families (9 women) after giving birth.

However, there is also an awareness that motherhood can be very stressful, demanding or exhausting. A total of 22 women (40.7%) admitted to feeling tired after becoming a mother and 17 (31.5%) even mentioned that they were afraid of this new reality.

Figure 11 - What it was like to become a mother (%)⁹



But as expected, becoming a mother brings many changes and new routines to the lives of couples, but especially to the lives of mothers. Many adjustments had to be made in the family with the arrival of a baby.

⁹ Multiple answers.

50 of the 54 Roma women interviewed (92.5%) expressed this view of change when asked about their lives after becoming mothers.

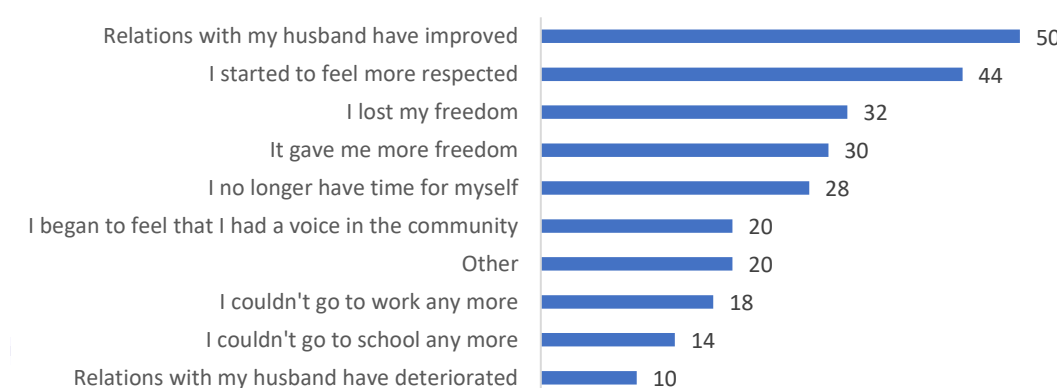
According to the respondents, some of the changes that come with motherhood are particularly impactful for a new mother. The changing most referred was the improvement of between the couple (25 women), although the opposite can be also true, on a much smaller scale (5 women).

Once again, respondents associate motherhood with improving their image and gaining more respect (22 women - 44%) and having more freedom (16 women - 30%) and a stronger voice in the community (10 women - 20%).

Less positive views of changes after motherhood were expressed by those who felt they had lost (some) freedom (18 women - 32%) and by those who felt they had no time for themselves (14 women - 28%).

Not being able to go to school (8 women) and not being able to work (10 women) were also mentioned as negative changes.

Figure 12 – Changes in life after motherhood (%)¹⁰



¹⁰ Multiple answers.

III. 6. The relevance of information

Becoming a mother does not necessarily mean having all the information needed to manage this event in the best possible way, considering the wellbeing of both mother and child. However, the majority of respondents in Greece (38 women - 70%) felt that they had the information they needed to care for a child. Many of these women may have already played an important role in caring for their siblings in their families, which may be a favourable factor in their own motherhood.

It is almost taken for granted that all pregnancies are followed up nowadays. Among the Roma women interviewed, a high percentage had attended hospital/medical appointments before giving birth (49 women - 90.7%). Only five women (9.3%) did not attend such appointments.

The main reasons for not attending were related to the importance of this follow-up, which four of the Roma women did not consider because they did not know about it. Two women did not know how to go and another two did not have anyone to accompany them.

The opposite is true when attending antenatal classes is taken into account. Only five women reported attending antenatal classes, meaning that the majority did not prepare for the birth. Among this subgroup of women, almost 40% (19) did not know how important these classes were and/or did not know they existed. It was also referred also by 40% (19) that did not know the existence of such service, because no one told them or/and it did not exist at that time, when they had their first child:

'There weren't that many programs back then.' Roma Woman, 42 years.

'I didn't know they existed.' Roma Woman, 53years.

'No one informed me about antenatal classes.' Roma Woman, 39 years.

'The doctor didn't inform me about antenatal classes.' Roma Woman, 25 years.

'There were no such classes at that time.' Roma Woman, 71 years.

Another barrier to attending antenatal classes is a lack of knowledge about how to get there. These results are in line with studies that had highlighted that Roma women tend to have fewer antenatal visits.¹¹

Figure 13 - Reasons for not attending antenatal classes (%)¹²



Partly as a result of this lack of follow-up, Roma women tend to have higher rates of perinatal complications, and perhaps because of this, many Roma women (42 - 77.8%) have heard of postnatal depression and the majority also know someone who has suffered from it (64.3% - 27).

¹¹ For example: BMC Women's Health. (2015). *Standpoints of Roma women regarding reproductive health*. Retrieved from: <https://bmcmwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-015-0195-0>

¹² Multiple answers.

When asked about their own situation, 11 women (40.7%) felt that they were suffering from postnatal depression, but only four had received help. The most common reasons for not getting help were that the family did not think it was worth it and they were afraid to say what they were feeling.

III. 7. Preventing early marriage and early motherhood

Given the importance of the issue of early marriage and motherhood and how it can affect the lives of young Roma women, not only physically but also in terms of their choices and futures, the opinions of respondents highlight the need for intervention.

In this sense a total of 46 women interviewed (85.2%) considered important to promote some activities in order to reduce or/and prevent early marriage. Eight women have, however, a different opinion.

To these women three main reasons seem to be very clear: early marriage is too important within the Roma community; it is important to preserve tradition; and the fact that early marriage will never change regarding Roma people. Besides that, in their opinion Roma women like to marriage at an early age.

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Φορέας Ανάπτυξης Ανθρώπινου
& Κοινωνικού Κεφαλαίου
για την Αντιμετώπιση
του Κοινωνικού Αποκλεισμού



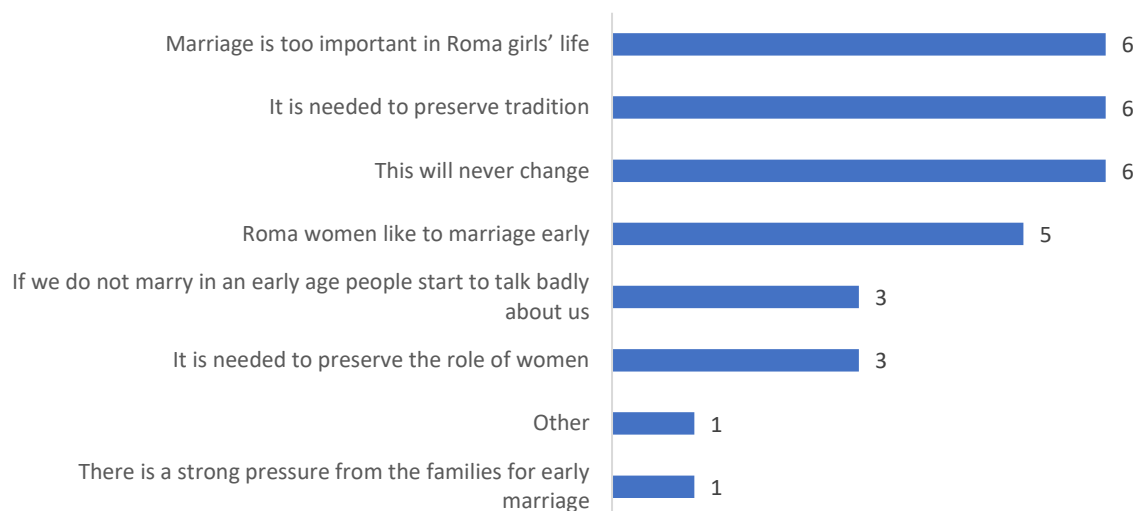
Cairde
Challenging ethnic minority health inequalities

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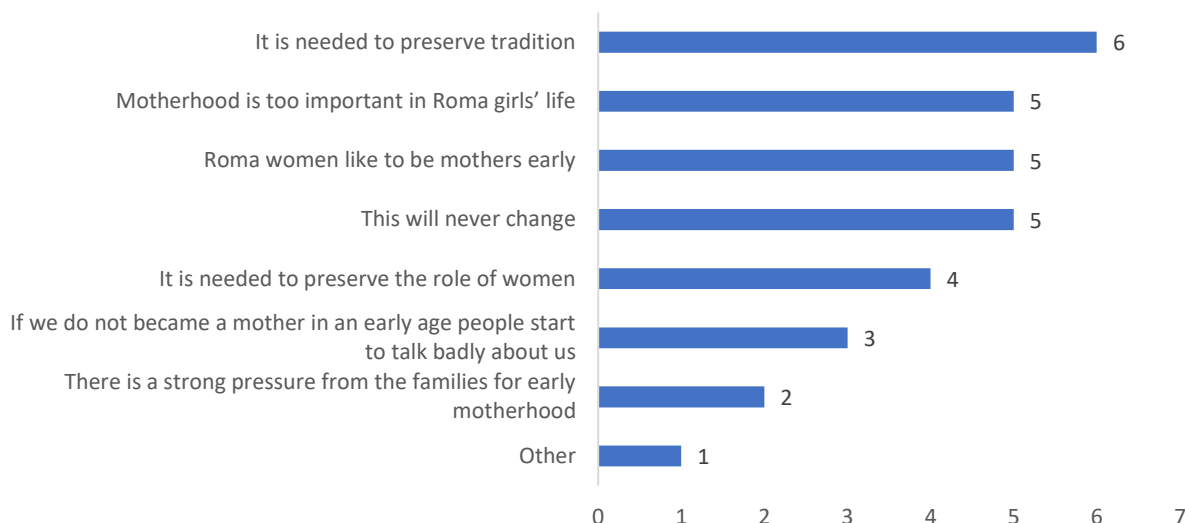
Figure 14 - Reasons for not promoting activities to reduce



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Once again, the preservation of tradition emerges as the main reason for not preventing early motherhood, according to these women. Their opinions confirm the importance of motherhood in Roma communities and for Roma who wish to become mothers at an early age. Once again, in their opinion, this is something that will never change: *'I would talk to them about the negatives of motherhood and marriage at a young age. But this tradition does not change. It is a Roma tradition. The laws need to be stricter.'* Roma Woman, 37 years.

Figure 15 - Reasons for not promoting activities to reduce/prevent early motherhood
(Absolute numbers)¹⁴



However, for those who consider that something can be done in favour of preventing and reducing early marriages and pregnancies, many suggestions and opinions were made.

Some respondents pointed to the need for women to have had their own lives before becoming mothers and to have had different experiences, particularly in the labour market. These views were expressed not only by young women but also by older women:

- *'Before they get married and have children, they must grow up, become women. To work. To feel themselves first.'* Roma Woman, 27 years.
- *'Girls must at least finish high school, have a high school diploma, and be able to find a job to comfortably raise their children.'* Roma Woman, 36 years.

¹⁴ Multiple answers.

- *'Girls need to learn that when they become mothers, responsibilities arise. As children, they should learn to live carefree.'* Roma Woman, 32 years.
- *'Girls should continue school, learn a craft. Family can wait. It will come at any age.'* Roma Woman, 26 years.
- *'Girls are still children. They should not give birth. They should live their lives.'* Roma Woman, 40 years.
- *'I would advise them to finish school, get a job, see what life is like and then have a family.'* Roma Woman, 62 years.
- *'We have to tell them that they have to grow up. Girls are children. They don't know what love and motherhood mean. Obligations are created.'* Roma Woman, 71 years.

In parallel, the importance of education and the right to a childhood as a child is clear:

- *'Girls are still children. They must not get married.'* Roma Woman, 32 years.
- *'Children should finish school earlier and become mothers at an older age.'* Roma Woman, 48 years.
- *'Children should get married at older ages, such as 20 to 22. They should go to school and finish school.'* Roma Woman, 19 years.

Some of them dared to give advice to the family of origin on how parents should view the marriage of young girls:

- *'I would tell parents that they should be more attached to their daughters. Not let them get married. Have relationships but not get married and not have children at a young age.'* Roma Woman, 49 years.

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- Others are aimed at the girls themselves and their capacity for self-determination so that they do not give in to community pressures:

- *'We need to tell girls that they need to go to school, finish it, go to college so they can get a job and be independent. When all of that is done, get married so they can support themselves and their children.'* Roma Woman, 45 years.
- *'We need to tell girls that they need to continue school, study, get a job, have their own money and everything will come at the right age. e.g. 25 years old.'* Roma Woman, 40 years.

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