

ITALY

UNRECOGNIZED AND UNEQUAL: THE STRUGGLE FOR ROMA RIGHTS

JEKHIPE RESEARCH FINDINGS 2025

Based on research conducted in
Italy under the JEKHIPE Project

Roma Population & Historical Context

Italy hosts one of the most diverse Roma and Sinti populations in Western Europe.

- Estimated Roma and Sinti population: **120,000–180,000 people**
- Approximately **60%** are Italian citizens
- Many Roma arrived during migration waves from the Balkans in the 1990s

Historical persecution has deep roots:

- Roma communities have been documented in Italy since **1422**
- Municipal bans on Roma presence date back to 1493
- During Fascism, around **1,130** Roma and Sinti were persecuted or interned between 1938 and 1943

These historical practices established long-standing patterns of criminalisation and exclusion.

Public Attitudes

Antigypsyism remains widespread in Italian society. Key indicators:

- **437 hate speech cases** recorded by the national anti-discrimination body in 2023
- **8.5% of all hate speech cases** targeted Roma, Sinti and Camminanti

Housing Segregation

Italy has maintained one of the most extensive systems of segregated Roma settlements in Europe.

Thousands of Roma live in segregated “nomad camps”. These camps are often located on the outskirts of cities. Many lack adequate infrastructure, sanitation, and services.

The “Nomad Emergency” (2006–2011)

One of the most severe periods of institutional antigypsyism occurred between 2006 and 2011. Key measures:

- Emergency decrees targeting Roma settlements
- Plans to evict up to 10,000 Roma from urban areas
- Large-scale police operations in major cities

In **2011**, Italy’s highest administrative court ruled that the “Nomad Emergency” was **unlawful**.

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Cultural and Political Recognition

Unlike many European countries, Italy does not officially recognize Roma and Sinti as a national minority. This leads to a lack of minority protections, limited institutional representation, as well as exclusion from many cultural and language policies.

This absence of recognition contributes to institutional invisibility.

Justice System and Policing

Roma communities frequently report discrimination in policing practices. Key concerns:

- ***allegations of racial profiling***
- ***strained relations between Roma communities and law enforcement***
- ***limited access to justice for victims of discrimination***

Recent security measures such as “red zones” in major cities have raised concerns about disproportionate policing in areas where Roma communities live.

Key Structural Challenges Identified

Research highlights several systemic issues:

- **housing segregation through the camp system**
- **widespread antigypsyism in media and politics**
- **limited minority recognition**
- **weak institutional accountability**
- **discrimination in policing**
- **insufficient Roma political representation**

These factors demonstrate that antigypsyism in Italy is structural and institutional, not only social.

Why This Matters

Addressing antigypsyism in Italy requires:

- **dismantling segregated camp systems**
- **recognizing Roma and Sinti as a national minority**
- **strengthening anti-discrimination enforcement**
- **increasing Roma participation in policymaking**
- **investing in inclusive housing and education policies**

Without structural reforms, existing policies risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.