

Why do people become activists or allies?

People often engage in activism or allyship because they want to be **heard and visible** and **raise awareness to the cause they feel strongly about**. By **reaching a wide audience** with their message, they aim to draw the attention of people who have been indifferent or passive, but potentially sympathize with the cause.

In the case of allies, some additional motivations may play a role in engaging for the benefit of other groups. Allies and activists may experience empathy towards the suffering of others, or sympathize with the cause. **However, not all motivations lead to sustainable activism and allyship and not all motivations guarantee improvement** in the conditions of Roma people.

Motivations facilitating allyship and activism



Roma people experience discrimination and marginalization in all areas of social life in Europe. Therefore, non-prejudiced individuals (Roma and non-Roma alike) may feel empathy when thinking of the hardships of Roma men, women and children. **Empathy** is a **stepping stone for activism**.

People stand up against injustice because they, as a group, feel **angry** about it. **Moral outrage** and experiencing **shared grievances** when facing injustice fuel the engagement in actions for Roma equality. Besides anger, people need to also feel **hope**, as believing that **change is possible** is a necessary condition to act on one's conviction.

Furthermore, believing that activists and their allies can be successful in making a difference, gives groups a sense of **efficacy**. People remain active as long as they believe in their (activist) group's efficacy.

Motivations undermining activism and allyship



When activism and allyship is driven by **empathy and pity only**, it can manifest in paternalism, which undermines the agency of Roma people and **cannot lead to change**. Remember that Roma people don't need saviors, they need allies!

Helping others, standing up for good causes is a very **rewarding experience**. However, when activists are primarily motivated by these direct rewards, it may blind them to the larger goal of social change which is hard to achieve and requires long-term engagement.

Image enhancing motivations that benefit one's own group may even be harmful to the movement. High-status helpers get the credit for helping, while the image of Roma people as a group in need becomes even stronger. This type of "allyship" becomes an **obstacle to social change**.

Most forms of activism are collective which helps building a **collective identity** for activists. This means Roma activists do not only act on their **Roma identity**, but also their "opinion based identities" which creates a strong bond between people who agree on the change they want to see in the world. This opinion based identity is also shared with allies and becomes the basis of their allyship.