

# A toolkit for pro-Roma engagement

Guidelines for Roma activists  
and their non-Roma allies

2022



ENGAGE

# WHO?



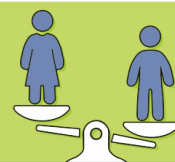
## Who can be a Roma activist?

**Any Roma person can become an activist.**

Every activist has a **different story** and there are **many different paths to activism**. Some activists can be driven by experiences of discrimination, some people become activists through meeting other active people, others have experiences of being active themselves in helping others or standing up for other causes. The path to pro-Roma engagement is different for people who are surrounded by activists, who have already engaged in some form of action, and those who have not yet begun their journey. They may feel the urge to do something, but don't know how to start yet. **NGOs and other institutions** can provide you with training, resources, support, advocacy, or job opportunities.



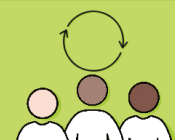
Even though every person identifies with many different groups (e.g. community, family, friends etc.), having a **collective identity**, i.e. thinking and acting in **terms of your community**, and forming an **opinion-based identity** that is driven by a **common cause** and **oriented towards change** is important on the path to activism. Most successful movements have members that strongly feel that they are **part of the group**. Although activists have many reasons to be **angry**, you can build a movement on feelings of **pride** for being a Roma as well.



## Who can be a non-Roma ally?

**Any non-Roma person can become an ally.**

Every ally has a **different personal story** to their engagement. Importantly, allies are also members of many groups and can have personal experiences of discrimination in these groups (e.g. as a woman). These experiences can lead to the recognition of their own privileges and power to speak up for Roma rights.



As an ally, it's also important to have an **opinion-based identity** that is motivated by a **common cause** and oriented towards **change in the society**. For example, you support the idea that Roma children should be educated in non-segregated classrooms, so you join as an ally a Roma movement that shares the same opinion, and is advocating for the cause. **Identification as an ally to Roma people** is the key to long term engagement.



The path to allyship is different for indifferent people, for non-prejudiced bystanders, and for already engaged **citizens who have been active in standing up against any form of injustice**.

## 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 **DOs** ✓

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

**X DON'Ts**

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.

# WHEN & WHERE?

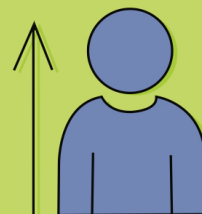
## When is the best time to act? Where are the places for activism and allyship?

Activism can happen anytime, anywhere.

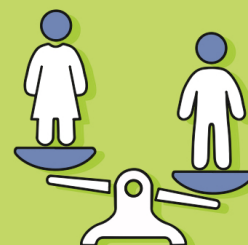
You can be active on **different levels** (e.g. local, national, EU) and in **different places** and **situations**, that are both formal (in local communities, schools, in interactions with government) and **informal** (everyday settings such as meetings with friends or family). Each requires a different type of action and engagement.



Engage in activism or allyship when you feel ready (and when you have resources and support). The “when” depends on your **personal development** and previous experiences with activism. For most Roma activists, this is a gradual process which involves channeling difficult and negative experiences into something positive and **empowering**. The importance of social support and finding people and organizations similar to you cannot be underestimated.



As an ally, remember that steps towards social change happen **gradually**. The smallest steps include standing up for someone in everyday situations or speaking up when witnessing both subtle and blatant **prejudice and discrimination**. Even though these are small steps, they are crucial in building an inclusive climate in the long run, and what is perceived as acceptable or unacceptable in society.



The **social context** in a particular country or local community matters for when and how people can engage in movements. Societal events or crises present an opportunity to build on the momentum and collective emotions to mobilize more people for the same cause.





# WHAT and HOW?



What do the Roma activists and non-Roma allies do? And how do they do it?

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As an activist and an ally, you can engage in many **different forms of action**. For example, you can act in everyday situations whenever there is prejudice and discrimination, by sharing information that you have learned about Roma people, engaging in conversations about stereotypes and prejudice, responding to problematic comments or micro discrimination (such as jokes), even when it feels uncomfortable. This can help create non-prejudiced **social norms** in **your closest environment**. Also, you can **volunteer** or start working for an organization that advocates for Roma rights or you can financially **support** such an organization or actions. Moreover, you can sign or start a **petition** to support a specific cause related to Roma rights. Or you can engage in a **protest** to support the Roma and convince your close ones to join too.

## Roma activists

Sustainable activism is **collective**. Find **hope** and **empowerment** in joining others and finding **alliances within** the Roma community (or beyond). This can help you transform negative experiences into activism and can give you great **pride** in your identity as a Roma person and in your identity as an activist.

You are a member of many groups and social categories. Being Roma is important, but only one of your identities. **Reflect on your other identities** when engaging in activism. Use your **privileges** to help your cause, but also understand that not everyone within the Roma community has these privileges. **Be a good ally to Roma people with less privileges.**

Involve your community to gather more support for change and to have a stronger voice. Also, **find allies** in the majority or other disadvantaged groups who will amplify your voice.

Consider the **costs and risks** of activism as you might be facing obstacles, failures or even physical attacks as an activist. Not considering the costs might lead to disappointment, frustration, disillusionment and eventually demobilization.

Direct the attention to the **structural causes** of anti-Gypsyism. Focusing on prejudice as an individual trait does not lead to change at the societal level.

When engaging in contact with non-Roma people, **it can be difficult to bring up the topic of discrimination and injustices**. Both of you may feel more comfortable to all together avoid this topic and focus on nice things. It is always your choice if you prefer to focus on the positive or discuss social injustices. **The most effective way to bring up the topic of discrimination and social injustices is by sharing stories** that induce empathy in the listener.

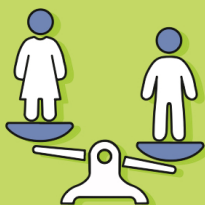


## Non-Roma allies

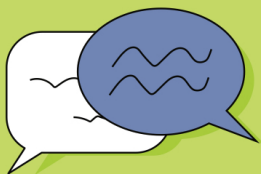
As an ally, you need to identify **your role and position** in the movement. Don't try to figure it out by yourself, get engaged with Roma people and find out how your engagement can be useful.



Recognize the **value of allyship** and use it **responsibly**. Sometimes your voice will be heard by authorities before the voice of Roma people is heard. This gives allies the responsibility to speak up, but also to create the space for Roma people to speak up for themselves.



Beware of your own **privilege** (and be willing to reduce your comfort) and **prejudices**. Don't be in the cause only for the direct rewards of activism or for your personal gain. Especially do not get engaged only to solidify your high status and privilege.



When you are in contact with Roma people, you may be motivated to avoid the topic of discrimination and injustices. This avoidance can create a nice atmosphere for both of you, but it can have a devastating effect for Roma activism. You need to **show openness to conversations about social injustices**.



Educate yourself and acknowledge your group's past and present wrongdoings and how it may still cause pain and suffering for Roma people. If past or present grievances are discussed, do not get defensive, but listen and respond with empathy. Be **open to feedback** from Roma people on your past and current actions. This is important to build partnership and trust.

## Non-Roma allies

Consider the **costs and risks** of allyship and take on only as much as you can offer sustainably. Temporary allyship can be important at particular events, but it can also lead to disappointment and may even cause damage to communities and for social change in the long run. However, also consider that activism may be less risky for non-Roma allies than for Roma activists, and identify your responsibility accordingly.



To make allyship sustainable, have long term and **larger goals** that include Roma issues, rather than focusing on single events only. For example, when insisting on school inclusion as a value you also insist on the inclusion of Roma pupils, or in advocating for more positions in elected offices for women you advocate for the Roma women too. Effective allyship means that you consistently speak up against discrimination and injustice whenever you encounter it.



Good allyship must be based on mutual **acceptance**, and not based on deservingness. As an ally, you should not have expectations about what and how Roma activists should do, but you can always engage in conversations about good and effective forms of activism as partners.



You need to think in **terms of what the Roma community really needs and not** in terms of what you think is good for them. **Do not patronize Roma people in general and Roma activists in particular.** As an ally, focus on empowering Roma people, not disempowering them.



Know when to **listen and affirm**, use your allyship to amplify Roma voices.



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