

Romani and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages



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The Romani language and its protection under the Language Charter

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (hereinafter “the Charter”) is the only treaty in the world that aims to protect and promote traditional regional and minority languages. While its primary focus is on territorial languages, i.e. which are traditionally used in a specific geographical area, it also recognises the importance of non-territorial languages, which are not tied to a particular area but are traditionally used across a state.

The Romani language is a key example of a non-territorial language and is explicitly referred to as such in the Explanatory Report to the Charter. Today, Romani enjoys protection under the Charter in 16 of the 25 states that have ratified it, although the level of protection varies. This variation reflects the Charter’s two-part structure: Part II outlines general principles and objectives applicable to all regional or minority languages, while Part III contains more detailed and binding commitments across areas such as education, the judiciary, public administration, media, culture, economic and social life, and cross-border co-operation. Most of the provisions of Part III of the Charter aim to protect or promote regional or minority languages in relation to the territory in which they are used. However, provisions of Part II of the Charter can be applied to non-territorial languages.

In countries such as Austria, Czechia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and Ukraine, Romani is protected only under Part II of the Charter. Other countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia apply Part III to Romani as a territorial language, offering an enhanced level of protection. Notably, Poland classifies Romani as a non-territorial language but still applies Part III provisions.

The Romani language represents one of the most complex linguistic cases in Europe. Although it belongs to the Indo-Iranian language family, it has many varieties due to the wide geographic spread of its users. States parties use various names in their ratification instruments and reports, such as Romanes, Romani, Romany, or Romani Čhib and the Committee of Experts of the Charter (Committee of Experts) uses, where relevant, the domestic terminology. However, in its evaluation reports, the Committee of Experts has consistently used “Romani language” as a single language, while acknowledging the diversity of its varieties.

The present factsheet outlines the challenges facing the Romani language in the states parties to the Charter where it is protected, drawing primarily on recent evaluation reports. It also provides a concise overview of the Committee of Experts’ approach to key issues concerning the Romani language, along with relevant recommendations. For further details and additional examples of recommendations, please refer to the evaluation reports of the Committee of Experts and its other work. (See [HUDOC-ECRML](#))

Key issues and recommendations

Many regional or minority languages have in common a greater or lesser degree of precariousness. The situation of the Romani language must be understood in light of the broader social conditions faced by its users. The Roma - Europe’s largest ethnic minority - continue to face antigypsyism and discrimination in all aspects of life, which directly impacts the standing of the Romani language. The Committee of Experts acknowledged

in its evaluation reports the connection between the challenges facing the Romani language and the differing levels of protection provided by various states parties. The Committee of Experts has also emphasised the need for awareness-raising initiatives in education and media, not only regarding Roma history and culture but also to counter antigypsyism and negative stereotypes, referencing the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2020\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials](#).¹

In some states parties, it has been observed that, due to deeply rooted historical discrimination, Romani users prefer to keep the Romani language as an “oral intra-community language,” which particularly affects the fields of education and media. However, the Committee of Experts does not view this as a justification for states to avoid their obligations under the Charter. On the contrary, the Committee of Experts encourages dialogue and consultation and asks the national authorities to promote the Romani language in education and public life while considering the needs and wishes of its speakers.

The lack of standardisation is sometimes reported by national authorities as one of the main impediments to introducing the Romani language in education and media and, more broadly, to complying with their undertakings. While the Committee of Experts supports standardisation and/or codification, it emphasizes that its absence should not prevent national authorities from taking measures to fulfil their commitments, at least in the field of education. Pre-school and primary education are often highlighted as starting points where the lack of standardisation is not a major obstacle.

The main challenges in protecting and promoting Romani across states parties include its limited use in public life (administration, judiciary, and public services), education, and media. A common pattern emerges in these areas, particularly when contrasted with its more varied use in cultural activities and in economic and social life, depending on the country. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that states often prioritise improving Roma living conditions and combating antigypsyism over language promotion.

Recommendations calling on states to take resolute action include:

- ▶ Design and implement a strategy (action plan) for the application of the Charter to Romani, in co-operation with the representatives of the users or Romani.²
- ▶ Take resolute measures to ensure the full implementation of the revitalisation programme for the Romani language.³
- ▶ Establish and ensure a long-term sustainable funding for the promotion of Romani and for the cultural activities and institutions of Romani speakers.⁴

The use of Romani in public life: administration and courts

The use of Romani in public life, particularly in courts and administration, is scarce in several states parties. The lack of administrative personnel proficient in Romani or qualified interpreters is often reported to be a barrier to its official use at the local level and

1. See, for example, [Seventh Evaluation Report on Germany](#) (2022), para. 84; [Seventh Evaluation Report on the Netherlands](#) (2022), para. 158.
2. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Czechia](#), p. 36.; [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51.
3. [Sixth Evaluation Report on Finland](#), p. 35.
4. [Third Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), p. 49, [Eight Evaluation Report on Norway](#), p. 31, [Fourth Evaluation Report on Poland](#), p. 59.

in public life, by national authorities. Even in states parties where Romani is protected under Part III, the widespread dispersion of the Roma within these states makes it difficult to meet the required thresholds for implementing certain undertakings. Regarding thresholds, the position of the Committee of Experts is clear throughout the evaluation reports: regional or minority languages should be introduced in equal and official use in municipalities where a sufficient number of regional or minority language speakers live, irrespective of any legal threshold.

Recommendations in the field of administration and judiciary include:

- ▶ Encourage the introduction of Romani into official use in additional municipalities so as to facilitate the application of the Charter.⁵
- ▶ Introduce Romani in official use in at least one local self-government unit, where the Romani speakers have their highest concentration.⁶
- ▶ Encourage local authorities to use Romani in their administrative activities.⁷
- ▶ Ensure sufficient numbers of trained Romani interpreters to enable the use of Romani in criminal and civil proceedings as well as in proceedings concerning administrative matters, in accordance with the undertakings ratified.⁸
- ▶ Take practical steps facilitating the use of Romani before court.⁹

The use of Romani in education

The use of the Romani language in education remains a recurring issue in the 16 states parties where it is a protected language. The following issues have been identified in evaluation reports: the Romani language is largely absent from mainstream education or public schools; teaching in/of the language is not included at all stages of education particularly at the pre-school level; where the language is included in formal education, the offer is often inadequate, either with insufficient hours or only as an optional subject. At the university level, Romani can be studied only in some states parties.

Other persistent challenges include the lack or shortage of qualified teachers and the absence or inadequacy of teaching materials. Additionally, teacher training is either sporadic or entirely absent. The Committee of Expert has identified these factors as structural obstacles to the inclusion of the Romani language in mainstream education.

Recommendations in the field of education include:

- ▶ Strengthen the teaching of Romani at all levels of education, including preschool and adult education.¹⁰
- ▶ Ensure financial means and teaching materials for Romani instruction while informing parents and students about available offers and encourage them to make use of them.¹¹

5. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51

6. [Sixth Evaluation Report on Montenegro](#), p. 28.

7. [Third Evaluation Report on Romania](#), p. 74.

8. [Sixth Evaluation Report on Montenegro](#), p. 28.

9. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51.

10. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Austria](#), p. 30, [Third Evaluation Report on Romania](#), p. 74, [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51.

11. [Third Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), p. 49, [Sixth Evaluation Report on Montenegro](#), p. 28.

- ▶ Develop and implement a coherent strategy for training teachers in Romani, encouraging the training of Romani speakers as teaching staff.¹²
- ▶ Incorporate the history and culture related to Romani in educational programs, promote respect, understanding and awareness of Romani language and culture as an integral part of a country's cultural heritage and of the contribution of the Romani speakers to the respective society as a whole.¹³
- ▶ Work closely with Romani speakers to develop sustainable teaching models, strengthen the educational offer, and identify ways to enhance Romani language instruction.¹⁴
- ▶ Encourage further research and teaching on Romani at the university level and provide facilities for its study as a higher education subject.¹⁵
- ▶ Increase the number of hours dedicated to teaching Romani in primary and secondary schools.¹⁶

The use of Romani in media

Media is another area where the Romani language is largely absent. Even when it does appear on radio or television, the undertakings related to media are rarely fulfilled due to inadequate offer. Although the presence of Romani is more common on radio, its representation remains inadequate, and it is often missing from television and print media. The Committee of Experts has consistently recommended to states parties to extend and strengthen the offer of radio and television broadcasts in the Romani language.

Recommendations in the field of media include:

- ▶ Take measures to increase the use of Romani in the media (broadcasting media, online and print media, audiovisual works).¹⁷
- ▶ Provide and support training for Romani-speaking journalists in order to strengthen the editorial capacities of public and private media.¹⁸
- ▶ Support the creation of a newspaper in Romani published at least weekly.¹⁹
- ▶ Encourage an offer of a television programme in Romani, possibly through social media platforms or digital streaming services.²⁰

12. [Sixth Evaluation Report on Finland](#), p. 35, [Seventh Evaluation Report on Germany](#), p. 73, [Sixth Evaluation Report on Montenegro](#), p. 28.

13. [Third Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), p. 50, [Eight Evaluation Report on Norway](#), p. 31, [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Austria](#), p. 30, [Seventh Evaluation Report on Germany](#), p. 73.

14. [Sixth Evaluation Report on Finland](#), p. 35, [Seventh Evaluation Report on Germany](#), p. 73, [Fourth Evaluation Report on Poland](#), p. 59.

15. [Eight Evaluation Report on Norway](#), p. 31, [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51.

16. [Eighth Evaluation Report on Sweden](#), p. 34.

17. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Austria](#), p. 30, [Fourth Evaluation Report on Poland](#), p. 59.

18. [Third Evaluation Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), p. 50, [Sixth Evaluation Report on Montenegro](#), p. 28.

19. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia](#), p. 51,

20. [Fifth Evaluation Report on Czechia](#), p. 36.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe is the only treaty in the world which aims to protect and promote traditional regional and national minorities' languages. The Charter gives precise guidelines on how these languages should be used in everyday public life.

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