



Strengthening Inclusion of Roma in European Museums and Cultural Institutions

A Framework for Ethical, Sustainable, and
Transformative Curatorial Practices

Timea
Junghaus

ERIAN
EUROPEAN ROMA
INSTITUTE FOR ARTS
AND CULTURE

ERIAN
NET **4EU**



Co-funded by
the European Union

Strengthening Inclusion of Roma in European Museums and Cultural Institutions

A Framework for Ethical, Sustainable, and Transformative Curatorial Practices

Written as a follow-up to the workshop and discussion of the ERIAC Arts and Culture thematic section on April 23, 2025 by ERIAC executive director, Timea Junghaus, curator, art historian

Introduction

Across Europe, museums and cultural institutions are rethinking their role in society. As public expectations evolve, these institutions are increasingly understood not only as custodians of heritage but as spaces of civic participation, dialogue, and ethical responsibility. The question of inclusion is therefore not peripheral to the mission of museums; it lies at the core of how cultural democracy is defined and practiced.

Within this landscape, the position of Roma communities remains a critical challenge. Roma people constitute Europe's largest ethnic minority, yet Roma remain among the least represented within national cultural infrastructures. Roma absence is not a reflection of cultural scarcity but of systemic barriers that have historically restricted access to education, creative industries, public funding, and institutional leadership. At the same time, Roma creative producers, artists, writers, filmmakers, and cultural workers have built rich and diverse cultural practices across Europe, often outside or in spite of institutional frameworks.

European cultural institutions, museums and organizations have a unique opportunity to address this imbalance. By engaging with Roma cultural production in a sustained and structural manner, institutions can not only broaden their collections and narratives but also strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the cultural sector as a whole. Roma-led initiatives such as ERIAC, RomaMoMA, Romani Pen the Writers' Association, the Ake Dikhea Film Festival, the RomArchive (and many others) and numerous grassroots art communities have already established ethical, collaborative models that demonstrate how inclusion can be enacted in practice.

This policy document builds on these existing strengths. It proposes a framework that supports institutions and organizations in moving beyond symbolic representation toward meaningful partnership and shared authorship. It urges institutions to recognize that Roma cultural inclusion is not a thematic or temporary concern but a long-term investment in a more just, knowledgeable, and sustainable European cultural sphere.

Policy Principle 1: Addressing Structural Exclusion & Transforming Institutional Structures Through Equal Participation

The first priority is addressing the structural conditions that limit Roma participation. Rather than limiting Roma participation to advisory roles, project-based engagements, or visibility as community representatives, funding frameworks should enable structural inclusion at every level of cultural production. Roma-focused projects must be understood as opportunities for institutions to reflect on their own structures and to strengthen them.

Funding should support not only project outcomes but the integration of Roma professionals into the full operational chain of the institution, including governance, curatorial development, research, mediation, and administration. Such an approach aligns with EU commitments to cultural diversity, equity, and democratic participation. It ensures that Roma cultural initiatives contribute to long-term institutional capacity building, rather than reinforcing temporary or peripheral modes of engagement.

European cultural institutions must adopt policies that ensure meaningful Roma involvement at all levels of artistic, curatorial, administrative, and strategic work.

Recommendations:

1. Create permanent Roma-led positions within institutions, including curators, collection managers, researchers, educators, and communications staff.
2. Establish Roma advisory councils with decision-making authority rather than consultative status, integrated into institutional governance.
3. Allocate dedicated multi-year funding for Roma-led cultural initiatives and partnerships, ensuring stability beyond project cycles.
4. Recognize the lived expertise of Roma cultural workers as knowledge equal to academic or institutional credentials.
5. Ensure transparent hiring and recruitment mechanisms that actively counter structural discrimination.

This shift requires museums to acknowledge that exclusion within cultural structures is not a matter of isolated incidents but embedded patterns of omission. Only structural solutions can create sustainable change.

Policy Principle 2: Ethical Curating Through Co-creation, Not Extraction

Roma creativity must not be extracted as content for institutional diversity programming. Ethical curating requires co-creation, reciprocity, and long-term collaboration.

Recommendations:

1. Replace one-directional curatorial authority with shared authorship between Roma creatives, artists, Roma-led institutions, and museums.
2. Develop co-curated exhibitions that protect the narrative sovereignty of Roma artists and scholars.
3. Ensure that all exhibition processes, from selection to text production, credit and compensate Roma contributors.

4. Use dialogical methodologies that encourage multi-voiced interpretation rather than single curatorial narratives.
5. When museums host Roma work, they should be prepared to be shaped, challenged, and transformed by Roma perspectives rather than simply displaying them.

This co-creative model aligns with contemporary curatorial scholarship and responds directly to the lived realities of Roma creators.

Policy Principle 3: Democratic Curatorial Processes and Redistribution of Power

European arts and cultural institutions must adopt curatorial practices that embody democratic values and redistribute cultural power.

Recommendations:

1. Treat exhibitions as platforms for negotiation, where Roma communities participate as equal partners.
2. Use participatory formats such as public assemblies, collaborative research groups, and open editorial boards.
3. Build internal structures that enable Roma-led teams to define exhibition themes, select artists, and shape interpretive frameworks.
4. Commit to programming that supports transgenerational participation, ensuring that Roma elders and youth are equally represented.
5. Recognize collective forms of authorship and incorporate them into institutional policy.

Such democratic curating strengthens public trust and aligns with European values of participation and inclusiveness.



Tamás Péli, Birth, 1983, installation view at documenta 15, photo by Fabian Fröhlich

Policy Principle 4: Recognition of Roma Art as a Contemporary European Art Form

Roma art is not a minority genre or ethnographic category but a central expression of European modernity and contemporaneity. Since the 1960s, Roma theorists and artists have shaped their own subjectivities through visual art, literature, film, performance, sound, installation, and other creative genres.

Recommendations:

1. Formally acknowledge Roma art as contemporary art, not heritage, folklore, ethnic art or further “othered” categories within the art world.
2. Integrate Roma artists into mainstream collections, biennials, and institutional programs with appropriate curatorial framing.
3. Build museum acquisition strategies that prioritize Roma contemporary work alongside canonical European works.
4. Commission new works from Roma creative producers addressing present social, environmental, and political questions.
5. Support research on Roma contributions to European cultural histories from the 20th century to today.

This reframing ensures that Roma art is understood not as an exception, but as an essential part of European cultural production.

Policy Principle 5: Building Roma Cultural Infrastructure

Given the historic exclusion of Roma communities from national cultural infrastructures, EU-level institutions must invest in the creation of new frameworks for Roma cultural production.

Recommendations:

1. Support Roma-led initiatives such as ERIAC, RomaMoMA, and community art spaces to function as cultural institutions in their own right.
2. Develop mobile, digital, and nomadic infrastructures that reflect Roma cultural practices.
3. Encourage partnerships between museums and Roma community centers, archives, festivals, and educational structures.
4. Finance long-term research and archival projects documenting Roma cultural and art histories.
5. Follow and support Roma-led platforms that broadcast up-to-date artistic and cultural information, as central nodes of Roma cultural life.

Infrastructure built from within communities is essential for equity and sustainability.



Multidisciplinary artist Mihaela Drăgan next to „The Abduction from the Seraglio”, installation work by artist Eugen Raportoru, 2022, courtesy of Iliana Schileru

Policy Principle 6: Honoring Roma Temporalities and Memory Practices

Roma art expresses time differently from linear Western narratives. Institutions and museums should adopt practices that respect cyclical, intergenerational, and relational temporalities.

Recommendations:

1. Develop exhibition and engagement formats that allow memory, testimony, and futurity to coexist rather than forcing chronology.
2. Recognize oral history, song, ritual, and embodied knowledge as valid curatorial materials.
3. Integrate witness-based practices (human-centered storytelling and direct testimonies rather than solely academic or curator-driven interpretations) into institutional/museum programming.
4. Collaborate with Roma elders as carriers of cultural knowledge.
5. Address the Holocaust against Roma communities with the same institutional seriousness accorded to the Jewish Holocaust.

This approach expands institutional capacity to acknowledge multiple historical perspectives.

Policy Principle 7: Embodied, Emotional, and Participatory Learning

Traditional frontal education models do not engage contemporary audiences. Roma creativity and curating demonstrate that learning must be relational, embodied, and emotionally grounded.

Recommendations:

1. Use performance, music, participatory singing, and story circles as educational tools.
2. Shift from lecture-based mediation to co-experience formats that allow visitors to enter cultural knowledge through emotion and presence.
3. Collaborate with initiatives like the ERIAC Barvalipe lectures, or RomaMoma to integrate embodied learning into museum programming.
4. Train educators in participatory pedagogy centered on empathy, sensory experience, and dialogue.
5. Encourage intergenerational learning that brings families, school groups, and communities into shared practice.

This aligns with EU cultural education goals promoting participation and emotional literacy.

Policy Principle 8: Linguistic Justice and Access

Language shapes cultural power. The exclusion of the Romani language from public cultural life must be addressed.

Recommendations:

1. Use the transnational and harmonised Romani language (available online and in the language books written by the ERIAC Romani Language Section between 2019–2025 and in accordance with the principles of the Curriculum Framework for Romani developed by the Council of Europe’s Language Policy Division) in exhibition texts, public programs, and digital communication
2. Support multilingual cultural production and translation practices.
3. Connect with the Roma creative writers of the Romani Pen Initiative, a model for multilingual literary and curatorial collaboration.
4. Ensure museum accessibility for Roma communities, including free entry programs and targeted outreach.
5. Develop Romani language learning materials through cultural institutions.

Linguistic inclusion strengthens cultural democracy.

Policy Principle 9: Transnational Alliances and European Solidarity

Roma culture transcends borders; its institutions should do the same.

Recommendations:

1. Foster transnational cooperation among Roma cultural organizations across Europe.
2. Develop EU-wide residencies, exchanges, and networks for Roma artists and curators.
3. Encourage cross-European programming at festivals, biennials, and museums.
4. Build alliances between Roma, Indigenous, Black, migrant, and queer cultural practitioners.
5. Use EU funding schemes to strengthen Roma-led cultural diplomacy.

Solidarity-based partnerships advance Europe's social cohesion objectives.

Policy Principle 10: Roma Creativity as a Lens for Rethinking Europe

Roma cultural production offers a powerful framework for understanding Europe's unfinished democratic project. It reveals gaps between values and reality, while offering pathways for cultural renewal.

Recommendations:

1. Treat Roma perspectives as sources of institutional innovation, not as thematic content.
2. Use Roma art to reflect on European belonging, citizenship, and democratic participation.
3. Invest in Roma curatorial leadership as central to Europe's cultural future.
4. Ensure Roma presence in shaping European cultural policy, research, and museum strategy.
5. Recognize that equity for Roma strengthens equity for all marginalized communities.

Roma art is not peripheral to European identity; it is central to its formation and future transformation.



Selma Selman, Self-portrait (washing machine) 2016, Photographer Tanja Kanazir, Courtesy of the artist

Conclusion

European museums and cultural institutions have a historic opportunity to reshape their structures, narratives, and relationships through the inclusion of Roma talents, artists, curators, and knowledge-holders. This requires a shift from representation to collaboration, from symbolic gestures to structural change, and from temporary projects to durable partnerships.

Roma cultural practices already model ethical curating: participatory, community-centered, emotionally intelligent, historically grounded, future-oriented. EU institutions must now learn from these practices and integrate them into their own operations.

Through structural inclusion, ethical governance, and long-term investment, European museums can help build a cultural landscape in which Roma creativity is recognized not as an addition, but as a foundation of Europe's cultural future.

Executive Summary

EU Policy Recommendations for Museums and Cultural Institutions Engaging with Roma Art and Communities

European museums continue to operate within structures shaped by long-standing cultural exclusion. Roma people remain severely underrepresented across all levels of cultural production. This recommendation provides a concise framework for institutions seeking to build ethical, sustainable, and future-oriented practices with Roma creative producers, musicians, visual artists, curators, and communities.

The central principle is structural transformation: Roma must be included not as consultants or occasional participants, but as co-authors, decision-makers, and cultural agents within institutions. Ethical practice in Roma curating is not a goal to work toward;

it already exists in Roma-led initiatives and must be recognized and integrated into European cultural policy.

Key recommendations:

1. Structural inclusion

Acknowledge that Roma underrepresentation is not the result of individual prejudice but systemic exclusion. Especially regarding funding for Roma inclusion, establish clear institutional strategies to counter discrimination, including anti-racist training, transparent recruitment, and permanent Roma-led positions across curatorial, educational, administrative, and leadership structures.

2. Ethical Curating Through Co-creation, Not Extraction

With available funding, recruit Roma professionals into permanent curatorial, leadership, educational, and administrative roles. Establish Roma advisory bodies with decision-making power and ensure transparent, anti-discriminatory hiring processes.

3. Democratic curatorial processes

Adopt participatory methods and redistribute curatorial authority. Build platforms for negotiation, shared interpretation, and multivocal narratives.

4. Recognition of Roma art as contemporary art

Integrate Roma art into mainstream collections, biennials, and programming. Support acquisitions, commissions, and research that position Roma art as a vital part of European modernity.

5. Support Roma cultural infrastructure

Invest in Roma-led initiatives such as ERIAC, RomaMoMA, Romani Pen, Ake Dikhea? Film Festival, and community art spaces. Develop digital and nomadic structures that reflect Roma cultural mobility.

6. Respect for Roma temporalities and memory practices

Design exhibitions that honor intergenerational time, lived experience, and embodied memory. Support projects centered on Roma elders, oral history, and Holocaust remembrance.

7. Participatory cultural education

Replace frontal teaching with embodied, emotional, and participatory formats. Programs like The Other Session demonstrate how learning can emerge through collective experience.

8. Linguistic justice

Integrate Romani language into exhibitions, mediation, and digital communication. Support translation and multilingual cultural production.

9. Transnational alliances

Facilitate Europe-wide networks, residencies, and collaborations that reflect Roma mobility and connect with other marginalized communities.

10. Roma art as a lens for European renewal

Acknowledge Roma perspectives as essential to Europe's democratic and cultural development.

Roma art offers Europe a powerful resource for cultural clarity, ethical renewal, and shared future-building. Implementing these recommendations will help European institutions move from representational inclusion to structural equality.

*On the cover: Sead Kazanxhiu: The Nest, 2012–2022, installed on the façade of the Fridericianum at documenta fifteen. © documenta and Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, photo: Nicolas Wefers