



# EMPOWERING MINORITY WOMEN IN EUROPE

Report Based on the  
FUEN Women of Minorities  
Conference 2024



# Introduction



Women from minority communities across Europe face a unique set of challenges due to the intersection of their gender and minority status. These challenges affect their access to education, healthcare, work, justice, and political participation. When different types of discrimination overlap, exclusion becomes even stronger and more difficult to address.

The FUEN Women of Minorities Conference 2024, held in Athens, brought together experts, activists, and minority community representatives to confront these challenges directly. By centering the lived realities of minority women, the conference created a powerful space for reflection, exchange, and the shaping of practical, forward-looking solutions.

This report captures the spirit of those discussions, offering core findings and bold recommendations to help governments, institutions, and civil society move beyond promises — and toward real, inclusive, rights-based change.

## General Equality Challenges Faced by Minority Women



Minority women across Europe continue to face deeply rooted and mutually reinforcing barriers across all spheres of life. These challenges are intensified by traditional norms, patriarchal systems, and economic marginalisation, especially in rural regions. While legal protections for gender and minority rights exist, their implementation often falls short, failing to address the layered realities of multiple and intersectional discrimination.

### Gender-Based Violence: Persisting Injustice

Minority women are at heightened risk of domestic abuse, trafficking, sexual assault, and honour-based violence. Underreporting remains widespread, driven by stigma, fear of retaliation, and deep mistrust of institutions. In Norway, nearly 50% of Sami women have experienced violence, often during adolescence — yet culturally sensitive support services remain scarce. In Montenegro, Roma women face powerful social pressures that deter them from seeking protection, with state mechanisms offering little support.

## Silent Voices: Underrepresentation in Leadership

Minority women remain largely invisible in politics, academia, and public life. Structural sexism, discriminatory political systems, unequal educational opportunities, and the absence of mentorship pipelines all contribute to their exclusion.

## Economic Exclusion: Locked Out of Opportunity

For many minority women, formal employment remains out of reach. Discrimination, low access to quality education and childcare, digital illiteracy, and exclusion from training programs force many into precarious, informal work. Roma women in Albania and Kosovo, for example, face chronic unemployment and economic insecurity.

## Educational Inequalities: Breaking the cycle

Minority girls often leave school far too early — victims of poverty, early marriage, discriminatory school environments, and geographic isolation. Cultural biases within school systems, low teacher expectations, and educational segregation reinforce exclusion. Only 4.5% of Roma girls in Bosnia and Herzegovina complete secondary education.

## Healthcare Inequities: When Systems Fail

For minority women, healthcare systems often pose more risks than remedies. Language barriers, systemic racism, cultural insensitivity, and lack of trust in health providers mean minority women frequently receive substandard care. Disturbing examples persist: forced sterilizations of Roma women in the Czech Republic and segregated maternity wards for Roma women in Ukraine.

## Legal and Policy Frameworks: Rights Without Remedies



Various international, European, and national laws exist to protect the rights of minority women. These include the CEDAW Convention, the Istanbul Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU Gender Equality Directives, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), and national equality and minority rights laws. While these

frameworks provide important legal guarantees, the participants at the Conference stressed that implementation remains weak. Intersectional perspectives are still often missing in national strategies, and enforcement is limited.

## Group-Specific Intersectional Challenges

The FUEN Women of Minorities Conference 2024 underscored the need to recognise how minority women's experiences differ by group context. Tailored, intersectional approaches are essential to addressing the layered discrimination and systemic exclusion they face.

### Roma Women

Roma women face some of Europe's most entrenched intersectional discrimination. Early marriage, educational segregation, high unemployment, and confinement to informal, precarious labour markets perpetuate cycles of poverty. Healthcare access remains critically poor, with grave abuses such as coerced sterilisation still reported. Political participation is virtually absent, while widespread domestic violence remains hidden due to deep-rooted institutional mistrust. Systemic bias continues to manifest in healthcare, notably through segregated maternity wards in Ukraine.

### Sami Women

Despite high educational attainment, Sami women in Norway and Sweden continue to experience systemic marginalisation. Around half report violence, often during adolescence, while access to culturally competent mental health services remains severely limited. Their underrepresentation in decision-making, combined with systematic disregard for their linguistic and cultural needs, deepens disparities in health, wellbeing, and civic participation.

### Turkish Minority Women in Greece

Turkish minority women endure layered exclusion from both state institutions and their own communities. Legal barriers curtail their right to form associations, while limited access to public services in their mother tongue and pervasive employment discrimination restrict their economic independence. At the same time, cultural pressures trap many between assimilationist state policies and traditional gender norms, severely constraining their autonomy and civic engagement.

## Greek Minority Women in Turkey

Orthodox women of Greek descent living in Muslim-majority regions of Turkey face a complex interplay of gendered, religious, and cultural discrimination. Patriarchal norms and restrictive societal expectations suppress their personal and professional development, while historical tensions and current Greek-Turkish political dynamics intensify their marginalisation.

## Pomak Women in Greece

Pomak women, predominantly based in remote rural areas, confront compounded barriers arising from geographic isolation, minority status, and religious identity shaped by historical and political dynamics. Limited access to quality education and economic opportunities continues to obstruct their personal and professional advancement, entrenching patterns of exclusion.

## Rural Minority Women

Rural minority women experience profound marginalisation driven by isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent gaps in access to healthcare, education, and employment. Mobility constraints and entrenched patriarchal norms, including the practice of early marriage, strip girls of future opportunities. Culturally insensitive services further entrench dependency and systemic exclusion.

## Young Minority Women

Young minority women stand at a particularly vulnerable crossroads of age, gender, and ethnicity. They are disproportionately affected by early school dropout, early marriage, and social isolation. A glaring lack of access to sexual education and youth-focused services, combined with exclusion from mainstream youth policies, leaves them highly exposed to violence, exploitation, and economic dependency — risks that will only grow without targeted, intersectional interventions.

# Promising Practices and Community-Based Interventions



The FUEN Women of Minorities Conference 2024 showcased a range of effective local, national, and European initiatives proving that targeted, culturally sensitive interventions can significantly improve the lives of minority women. These practices highlight the power of strategic advocacy, empowerment programs, and community-driven change.

## Economic Empowerment

In Kosovo, microfinance initiatives have enabled Roma women to build small businesses and achieve financial independence. In North Macedonia, digital literacy and skills training have opened new pathways into the digital economy, reducing isolation and strengthening women's financial security.

## Education Support

Inclusive curricula in Albania have helped minority girls stay in school by affirming their cultural identity. In Portugal, scholarship programs for Roma girls have promoted leadership, continued education, and civic engagement, demonstrating how culturally sensitive education strategies prevent dropout and foster empowerment.

## Healthcare Access

In Sweden, Sami health mediators have strengthened trust between minority patients and healthcare providers, improving health outcomes. Romania's reproductive health campaigns, tailored to Roma women's needs, have expanded knowledge and improved access to culturally competent services.

## Justice Access

In Hungary, legal aid programs have helped Roma women address domestic violence and property rights. Meanwhile, data collection initiatives in Ireland are shaping more targeted and effective legal and policy responses based on minority women's lived experiences.

## Representation and Leadership

Leadership quotas in Croatia have boosted minority women's participation in public life. Advocacy by pan-European organisations like the European Roma Rights Centre has driven systemic reforms, while the growth of minority women's councils across Europe has strengthened platforms for representation, dialogue, and influence.

## From Words to Action: Strategic Policy Recommendations



### Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:

Enforce anti-discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV) laws through an intersectional lens. Train police, judiciary, and legal professionals in cultural competency and minority rights. Expand access to culturally and linguistically appropriate legal aid tailored to the needs of minority women.

### Promote Educational Equity

Fund scholarships targeted at minority girls and young women. Integrate minority languages, histories, and contributions into national curricula. Enforce desegregation policies and foster inclusive schooling environments by training teachers in anti-bias education and cultural sensitivity.

### Expand Healthcare Access

Deploy mobile healthcare units to underserved areas. Employ minority community health mediators to improve trust and access. Train healthcare providers in cultural competency, protect reproductive rights, and ensure all medical practices uphold informed consent and dignity.

### Boost Economic Inclusion

Support minority women's financial empowerment through targeted microfinance programs, grants, and entrepreneurship initiatives. Provide vocational training in high-demand sectors and promote digital and financial literacy to open access to modern job markets. Strengthen social protections for informal and precarious workers.



## Enhance Leadership and Civic Participation

Introduce quotas to ensure the presence of minority women in political, public, and administrative leadership. Build mentorship pipelines to nurture emerging leaders and promote intergenerational leadership development. Strengthen minority women's councils to amplify their voices in governance.

## Foster Cultural Change and Awareness

Launch stereotype-breaking national campaigns and highlight the achievements of minority women as role models. Promote inclusive storytelling across media, education, and the arts. Encourage sustained community dialogue on gender equality, minority rights, and inclusive citizenship.

## Improve Monitoring, Accountability, and Data Collection

Collect and update disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity, and geography to accurately capture inequalities. Set measurable goals for inclusion and evaluate the impact of policies regularly. Institutionalise participatory feedback mechanisms that give minority women a voice in shaping and monitoring policy reforms.

# Toward a Just and Inclusive Europe

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The FUEN Women of Minorities Conference 2024 made one truth clear: meaningful inclusion of minority women is not optional — it is essential for democracy, equality, and social progress in Europe.

The challenges minority women face are deep, intersectional, and urgent. But they are not insurmountable. Real change demands more than promises: it requires legal reforms, inclusive education, culturally competent healthcare, economic empowerment, leadership opportunities, and policies grounded in lived experiences.

Across Europe, positive examples show that when minority women are empowered, they transform their communities and societies. Now is the time to scale these successes — moving from rhetoric to reality, from symbolic gestures to systemic change.

This report offers a practical roadmap built on the voices, insights, and solutions shared at the FUEN Women of Minorities Conference 2024. Together, we can create a Europe where every woman, regardless of her background, lives with dignity, equality, and freedom.

The future of a truly inclusive Europe starts here — and it starts now.

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