



SIGNALLING ROMA ETHNICITY ACROSS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Introduction and key challenges

Discrimination against Roma people in Central and Eastern Europe

International Research Workshop, (26-27, March 2026.)

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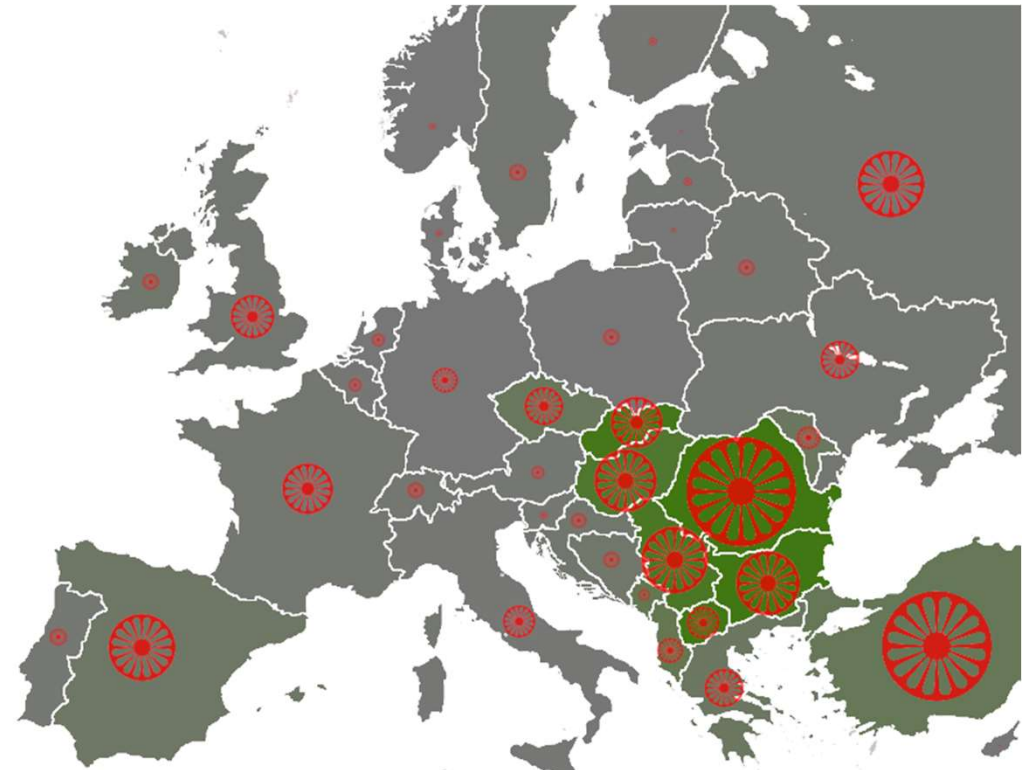
ROMA MINORITY IN EUROPE (IN A NUTSHELL):

Roma people: the largest, transnational ethnic minority group in Europe (10–12 million people; FRA, 2016),

The share of Roma population is the highest

in Hungary and the lowest in Spain:

- HU: 480-800 thousand (5-8% of the total population)
- CZ: 200-300 thousand (2-3% of the total population)
- ES: 700-750 thousand (1.5-1.6% of the total population)



Distribution of the **Romani people** in Europe (2007 **Council of Europe** "average estimates", totalling 9.8 million)^[1]

* The size of the wheel symbols reflects absolute population size

* The gradient reflects the percent in the country's population: 0%  10%.



ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROMA PEOPLE IN EUROPE:

- **On average 80% of Roma people living in at risk of poverty** (FRA Roma surveys, 2016, 2022) (vs EU average of 17%);
- **Pronounced economic and social exclusion**, along with residential and school segregation (Kemény & Janky, 2006; Kertesi & Kézdi 2012);
- Widespread **negative stereotypes and prejudice** (Enyedi et al., 2004; Örkény & Váradi, 2010; Váradi et al., 2021,) **reflecting socially approved dominant social norm** (Kende et al. 2017);
- **Significant levels of discrimination** in policing (Miller et al., 2008) and access to both public and private services (Simonovits et al., 2021; Simonovits et al., 2023; Takács et al., 2024 Bartos et al 2016; Mikula and Montag, 2022);

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'ROMA'? A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW (Messing and Pap, 2024)

- **Conceptual inconsistency of Roma identity:**
Roma are defined in multiple ways: as an ethnic group, racialized minority (*'victimization'* focus), national minority (*'recognized cultural claims'*) , or socially disadvantaged group across institutional contexts.

- **"Cacophony" of classifications:**
Overlapping and inconsistent definitions create ambiguity, hindering coherent understanding and policy design.



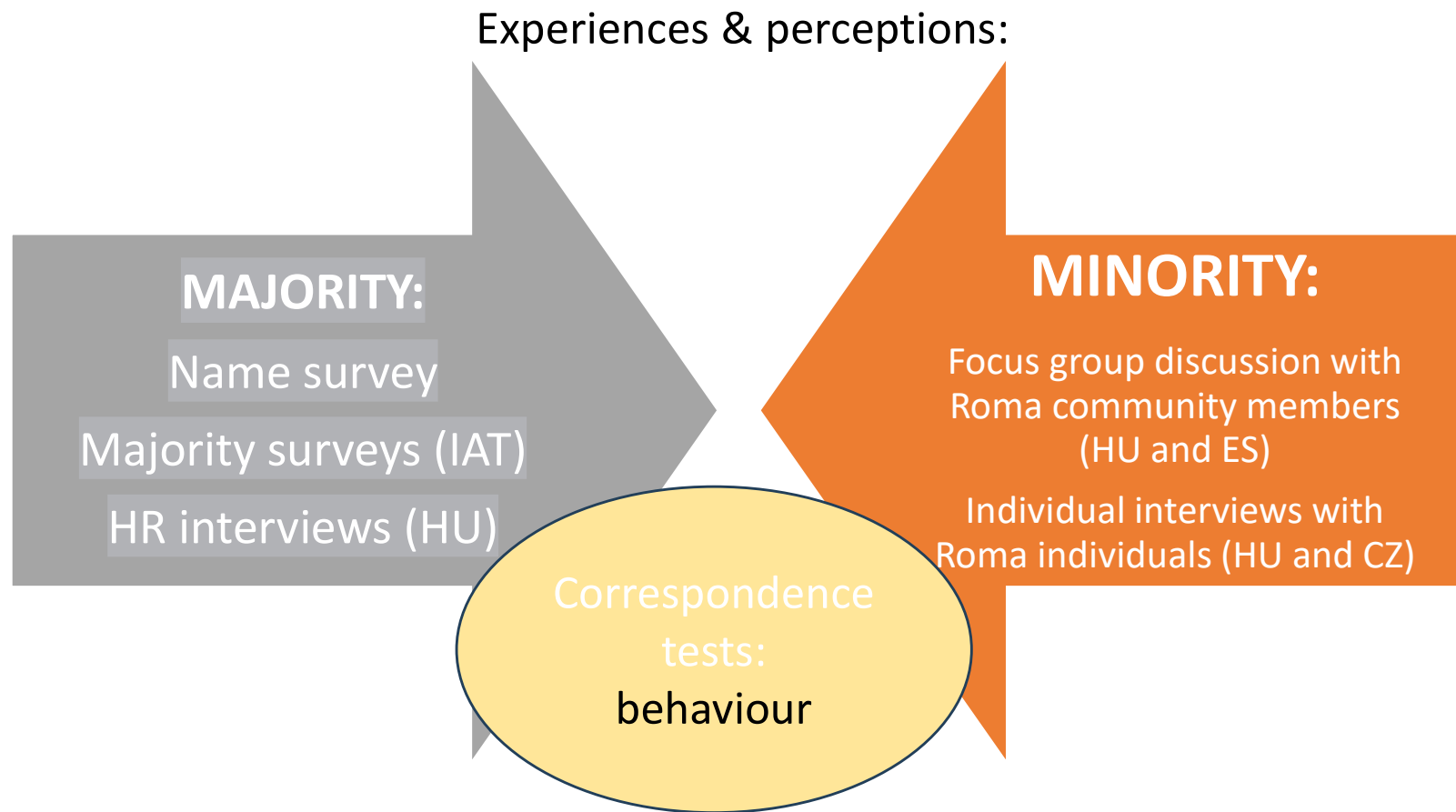
Need for conceptual clarity:
Clear and consistent definitions are essential for meaningful empirical research.

- **Operationalizing ethnicity:**
is often associated with sensitivity and an over-cautious approach to privacy in continental Europe. **"Data-processing phobia"** (Messing and Pap, 2024);



- **The particular Murphy's law:**
Perpetrators easily identify targets, while authorities and well-intentioned actors face privacy constraints when addressing different forms of discrimination.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN EQUALSTRENGTH



operationalizing techniques (***self-identification*** vs ***external identification*** by a third party) should also be taken into account when designing research!

ROMA SPECIFIC CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES: IN THE FIELD EXPERIMENTS

How to signal ethnicity?

- Using **names** (all domains) and **photos** (LM) as experimental stimuli



- Validity issues?
 - **Internal:** what do we measure with names?
 - **External** (country specific regional differences)



Name survey+qualitative validation

Our initial expectations:

- **Spain:** lack of distinct markers; weak **name** and **phenotype** signalling;
- **Czechia:** Hungarian-origin Roma surnames (e.g. Balog, Lakatoš, Darvaš); low specificity of ethnic markers;
- **Hungary:** regional variation of Roma names; limited cross-regional validity of surnames;

HOW TO SELECT ETHNICALLY DISTINCT NAMES?

THE TIMELINE OF THE NAME SURVEY (AND PHOTO VALIDATION)

Summer, 2023

PRE NAME SURVEY

- Majority names:
 - Official statistics
- Minority (Roma) names:
- various country dependent sources

2024

POST NAME SURVEY: VALIDATION

- **Winter, 2024:** Focus group discussion with Roma target groups (Hungary and Spain)
- **Fall, 2024:** HR representatives: validation of the CVs (Hungary)

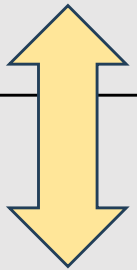
NAME SURVEY

- Testing names on population based on-line survey (in 2 rounds)
- Ethnicity, gender

Autumn, 2023

HOW TO SIGNAL ETHNICITY THROUGH NAMES? PRACTICAL CHOICES AND ISSUES

Table 1: Majority and minority name sources by country

	Hungary	Czech Republic	Spain
Majority names (official sources) 	Official lists of most common first and last names (Ministry of Interior)	Census-based official name data (Ministry of Interior)	Officially published name sources
Minority names (No official data)	Publicly available lists (Roma self-government representatives, NGOs, CEU program)	NGO survey data on Roma clients (Brno) with separated first names and surnames	Based on regional survey (Lermo et al., 2006) and registry data from Secretariado Gitano (30,000+ individuals)

HOW TO SIGNAL ETHNICITY THROUGH NAMES? THE SELECTION PROCESS

Hungary:

40 names (20
Roma and
non-Roma)

Czechia:

32 names (20
Roma and
non-Roma)

Spain:

48 names (16
Roma, 32
non-Roma)

The selected first names and the surnames randomly paired;



Selection is based on a complex country specific method (focus on distinctiveness); **BS1**



10 male and 10 female names were tested for both Roma and non-Roma in the name survey ; **BS2**

9. dia

- BS1** mi alapján választottuk ki ezek közül a 10-10 tesztelendő nevet? kicsit belezavarodtam...
Simonovits Borbála; 2026-03-19T18:06:17.328
- BS1 0** ez csak HU ra ez igaz? "Selection based on distinctiveness and frequency:
Roma names were compared to official Hungarian name distributions; overly common names were excluded, while sufficiently frequent and ethnically distinctive names were retained using additional sources (e.g., surname encyclopedia, Facebook frequency checks)"?
Simonovits Borbála; 2026-03-19T18:11:44.649
- BS1 1** kimásoltam dia jegyzetbe amit találta, a sharepointban
Simonovits Borbála; 2026-03-19T18:13:39.506
- BS2** Ez a 10-10 honnan jön? Nálunk pl 20-20 volt, nem?
Szczuka Borbála Júlia; 2026-03-24T08:51:36.350
- BS2 0** végül 10-10 et választottunk ki
Simonovits Borbála; 2026-03-24T15:46:18.992

TABLE 3: NAMES SELECTED FROM THE NAME SURVEY, BASED ON CONGRUENCE RATES

Country	Gender	National Majority	Roma Minority
CZ	Male	Jaroslav Veselý Josef Černý	René Gaži Ernest Lakatoš
	Female	Lenka Veselá Anna Horáková	Vanesa Gažiová Adriana Lakatošová
ES	Male	Xavier Martí Roca Sergi Sánchez Romero Jordi Puig Solé David Vila Gil Alex Ferrer Morales Álvaro Martínez García Javier Núñez Delgado	Erik Heredia Salazar Aaron Cortés Heredia
	Female	Anna Martí Roca Mireia Sánchez Romero Laia Puig Solé Marina Rubio Serra Andrea Fernández Ortiz Alba Martínez García Marta Núñez Delgado	Tamara Heredia Salazar Saray Reyes Montoya Erik Heredia Salazar Aaron Cortés Heredia Heredia
HU	Male	Gergő Kiss Bence Fekete Balázs Szabó Ákos Simon	Dezső Kolompár Richárd Kalányos Adrián Bangó Krisztián Orsós
	Female	Adrienn Mészáros Ágnes Fekete Nóra Szabó Tímea Szilágyi	Ibolya Kolompár Evelin Kalányos Dorina Lakatos Cintia Orsós

t

TABLE 4: NAME-SIGNAL CONGRUENCE RATES BY COUNTRY

	CZ	ES	HU
N of respondents	638	512	300
Majority	0.92–0.96	0.89–0.99	0.93–0.97
Roma	0.74–0.78	0.70–0.80	0.83–0.92
Congruence rates – Ethnicity			
For majority names	92–98%	85–95%	91–97%
For Roma names	76–78%	52–71%	76–89%
Congruence rates – Gender			
For majority names	94–100%	88–98%	92–100%
For Roma names	94–95%	85–100%	93–100%

Note: Congruence rates measure the extent to which the signals of ethnic origin and gender are perceived as intended.

The upper panel shows computed score variable $((0.8 * \text{Gender congruence rate} + 1.2 * \text{Ethnicity congruence rate}) / 2)$

HOW TO DESIGN PROPER PHOTOS?

Table 2: Use of pictures (AI generated) by country

	Hungary	Spain
Pictures	AI tools tested Imagine.art ;	AI tools tested (DALL·E, Imagine.art)
Evaluation with Roma target groups	Romaversitas members and NGO participants (e.g. Autonomía Foundation)	Members of an NGO (Secretariado VV2no)
Evaluation with HR staff (names, pictures, CVs)	5 interviews	Not used

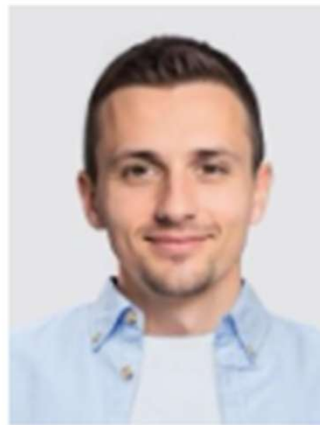
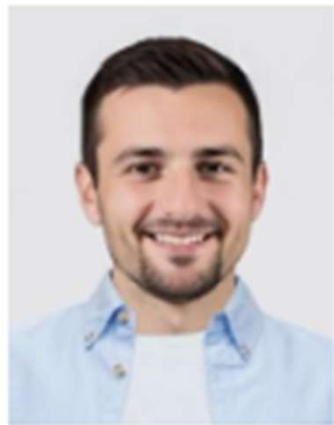
VV3

12. dia

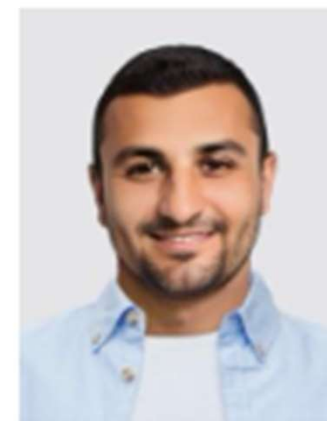
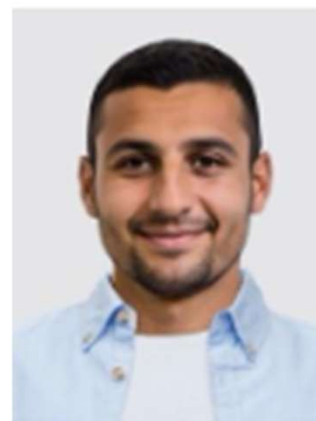
- VV1** 3an kaptak utalványt <https://bitudastar.app.box.com/file/1648461555705?s=p22vjs1voirnr5nnpnh88gan01bj8jqua>
Veronika Vass-Vigh; 2026-03-18T12:22:41.505
- VV2** Nem volt ilyen NGO specifikus az összetétel: <https://bitudastar.app.box.com/file/1408132352848>
Veronika Vass-Vigh; 2026-03-18T12:23:15.581
- VV3** Ez eléggé technikai, én kihagynám az első sort - ugyan azokat a képeket használtuk, ebből egy picit úgy tűnik mintha mindenki mást generált volna (kivéve a csehek)
Veronika Vass-Vigh; 2026-03-18T12:24:32.958
- VV4** 5 interjú volt: <https://bitudastar.app.box.com/folder/218929295615>
Veronika Vass-Vigh; 2026-03-18T12:26:59.233
- BS5** azt jól értem hogy a csehek nem teszteltek semmit, de végül használták a képeket, ugye?
Simonovits Borbála; 2026-03-19T18:31:01.400

FINAL PHOTOS USED IN THE LABOUR MARKET EXPERIMENT

MAJORITY INFORMAL
PHOTOS (HU/CZ):



ROMA INFORMAL
PHOTOS (HU/CZ):



13. dia

VV1

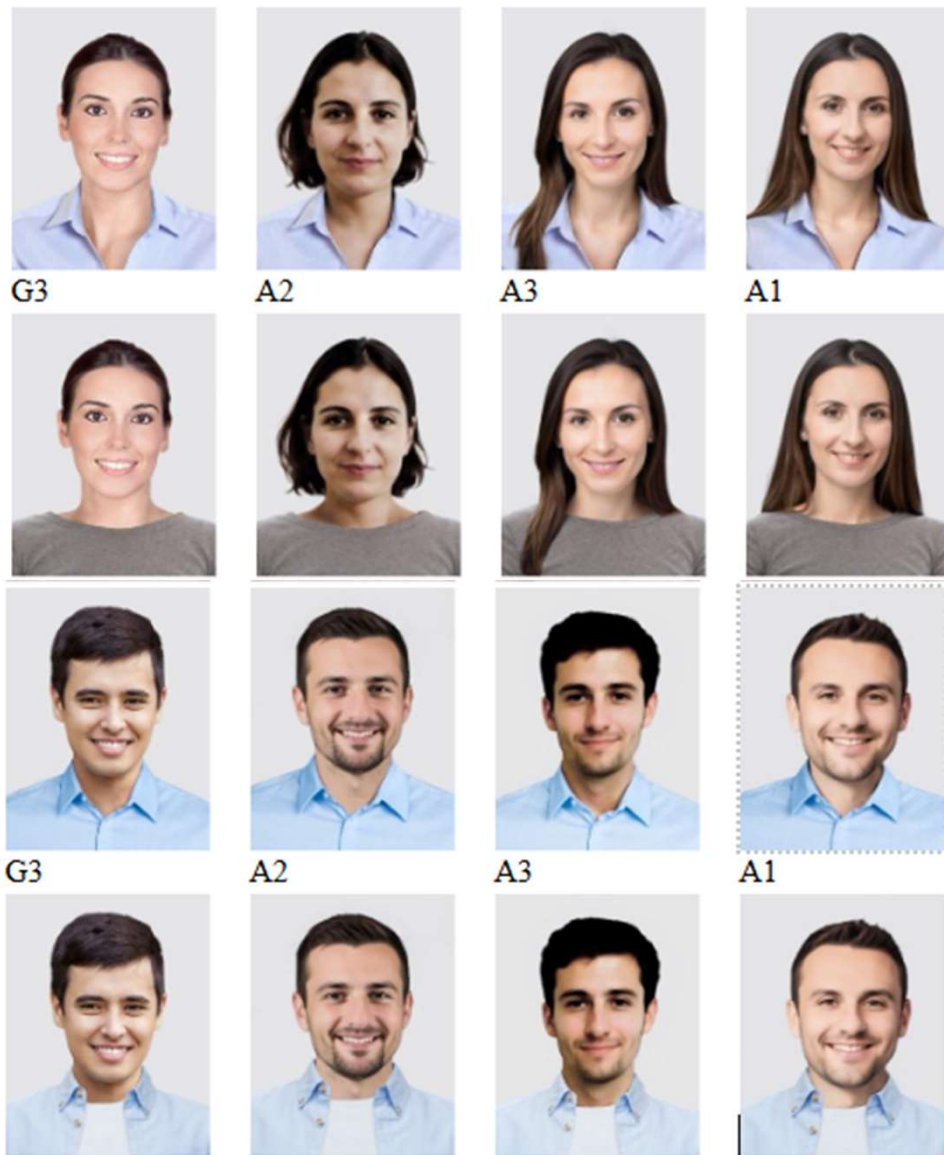
HU és CZ csak 2 képet használt (A6ost vagyis a balról első roma képet csak ES használta)

Veronika Vass-Vigh; 2026-03-18T12:30:48.468

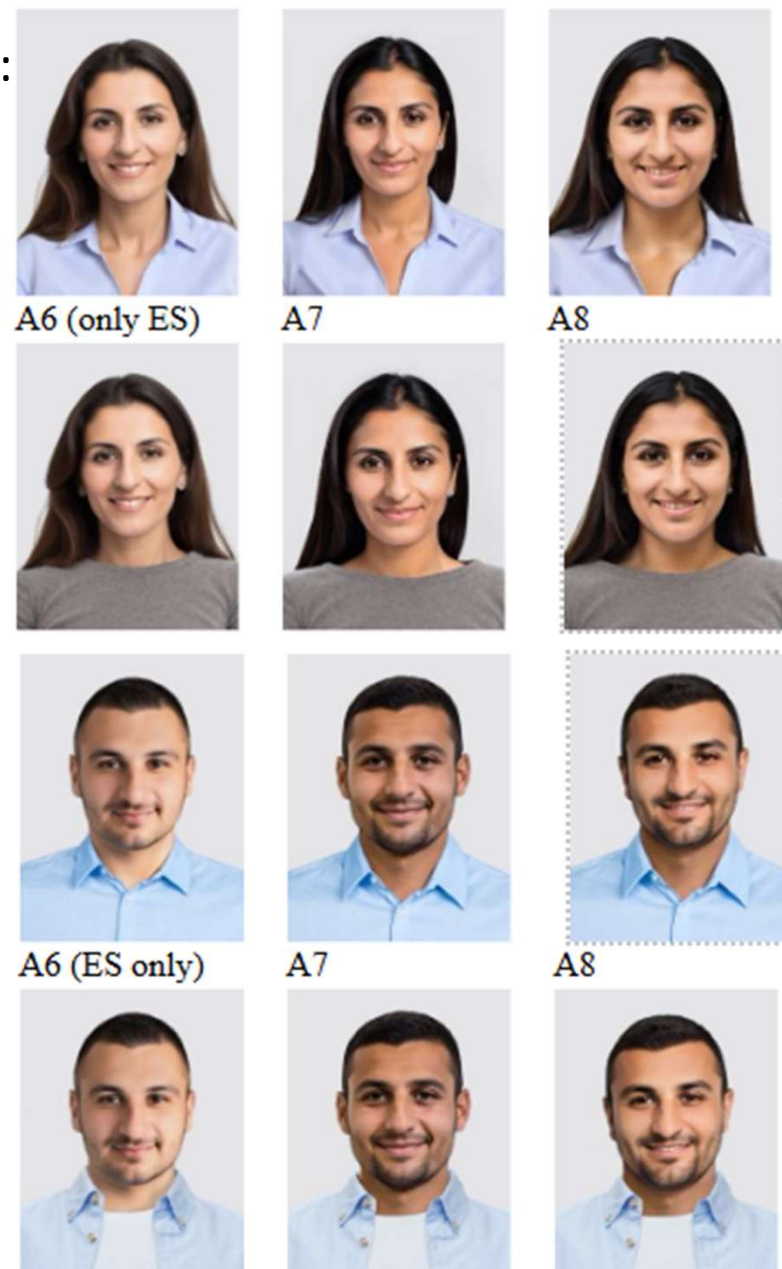
IN SPAIN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT APPROACH:

INFORMAL AND **FORMAL** PHOTOS:

Majority:



Minority:



QUALITATIVE RESULTS (HUNGARY AND SPAIN):

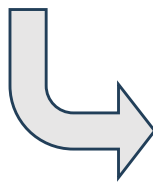
- Focus groups with Roma community members (2024)

- Aim of the group discussions:

- Selection of the final photos and feedback on the names

Hungary:

- **Surnames** salient but not always distinctive (e.g. Lakatos) and regionally variable;
- changing surname in some regions reduce visibility;
- **First names** are weak markers: unreliable and socially fluid, shaped by generational and pop cultural trends;
- **Combined cues increase certainty:** names + photos strengthen perceived identification;



Spain:

- **Visual cues as ambiguous:** stereotypical features identified, but often misclassified (e.g., Latin American, Indian);
- **Surnames are stronger than photos:** images frequently generate uncertainty;
- **Names as more reliable signals:** especially surnames, with some regional variation;

“Soap opera and footballer names are more common for people born between 2007 and 2008 like, Romeo or Ronaldo” (participant P15, focus group 2)

QUALITATIVE RESULTS (HUNGARY AND SPAIN):

- Focus groups with Roma community members (2024)

In sum:

- Naming perceived as a **sensitive, cultural identity** issue;
- Contraversial opinions within and across groups;
- Distinguishing minority vs majority names are complicated;
- We made sure that **the names selected for the experiments** are not associated with people who **might be very well-known and thus carry a signal beyond our control**.

"They are nice. Although I wouldn't say with complete certainty that Dorina Lakatos or Julianna Kanalas is Roma. I have several non-Roma acquaintances with the surname Lakatos, for example." (participant P1, focus group 1)

"The name says a lot."... "The picture, that would be secondary. So if he has a gypsy name, nowadays, Orsós, Bogdán, Kalányos, whatever, and no matter what his first name is, the surname says a lot, unfortunately."
(participant P10, focus group 2)

Limitations:

- Only Roma names and photos were discussed
- Sample restricted to educated Roma participants

QUALITATIVE RESULTS (HUNGARY):

Expert interviews with HR representatives

Aims:

- **Pre-testing experimental design**
- Validate stimuli (photo, name, text, email address);
- Finetune the content in the cover letter and the placement of the key information;
- Evaluate the role of cover letters



Results:

- No explicit identification of Roma ethnicity (i.e. ethnic cues remained below the threshold of conscious reporting)
- Cover letters processed only superficially
- No concerns raised about AI-generated photos
- No comments on unrealistic email domains (i.e. mailvista)

Bangó Adrián

Önéletrajz



E-mail: bango_adrian@mailvista.hu

Telefon: 06XXXXXXX

Lakhely: Cegléd

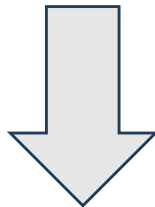
Születési dátum: 1994. november 8.

Rólam

Tapasztalt raktáros/targoncavezető vagyok, több mint 10 év szakmai gyakorlattal a raktározás területén. Pályafutásom során targonca segítségével mozgattam termékeket és árut, és az ehhez kapcsolódó adminisztrációs feladatokat is végeztem. Rugalmas és megbízható szakember vagyok, igazi csapatjátékos, jó időgazdálkodási és problémamegoldó készségekkel rendelkezem.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS

- **Conceptual ambiguity → measurement ambiguity:**
In line with Messing & Pap (2024), **inconsistent definitions** of Roma identity translate into **weak and context-dependent empirical signals** (names, photos).
- **Unstable markers of ethnicity:**
The **limited reliability of names** and images reflects the broader “cacophony” in **how Roma identity is socially constructed and recognized.**



- **Implications for research design:**
Challenges in signalling ethnicity using only **names** and **photos**
- Additional concerns regarding the **conflation of ethnicity** with **perceived social status**



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