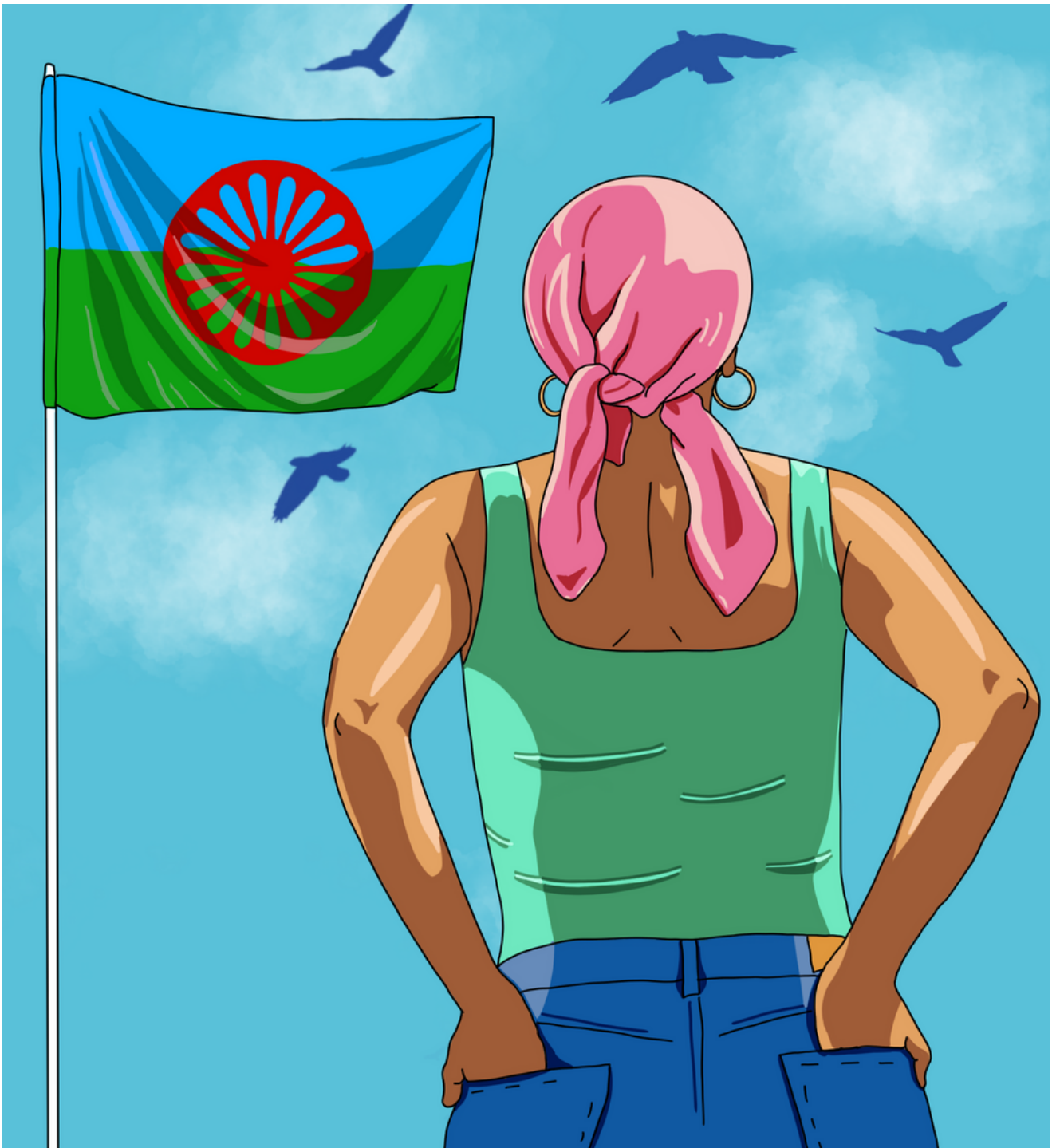




ADINA'S STORY

ROMA WOMAN



AT THE INTERSECTION OF MULTIPLE WORLDS

Life stories of Roma and Roma LGBTQ people

In a society that sanctions individual differences and attaches harmful labels too easily to those who do not conform to the majority, Roma and LGBTQ people often navigate with difficulty various areas of life. More often than not, they are harshly judged or marginalized, and in the public space, they are rather invisible, many of them choosing not to reveal their identities in an attempt to protect themselves.

We believe in the power of personal stories to overcome prejudice, simplistic labelling and even discrimination. That is why we are sharing the life stories of five Roma people, including four LGBTQ people from all over the country, with very different life experiences, different levels of education and professions, and different personalities. These are stories about personal quests and self-discovery, happiness and personal victories, about trauma and healing, difficulties and love stories. Their protagonists are **Adina**, a Roma woman; **Dora**, a non-binary Hungarian Roma person; **George**, a gay Roma man; **Izabella**, a lesbian Roma woman and **Daniel**, a gay Roma man. To stay true to their authentic voices, their stories are presented in the form of interviews with small changes in order: their names were changed to protect the identity of the interviewees, the details that could lead to the identification of the interviewees were removed, and some of the answers were edited for brevity and clarity.

The answers in these interviews reflect exclusively the opinions of the interviewees, and are not the official point of view of the Centre for Legal Resources (CLR), nor of the partners involved in this project.

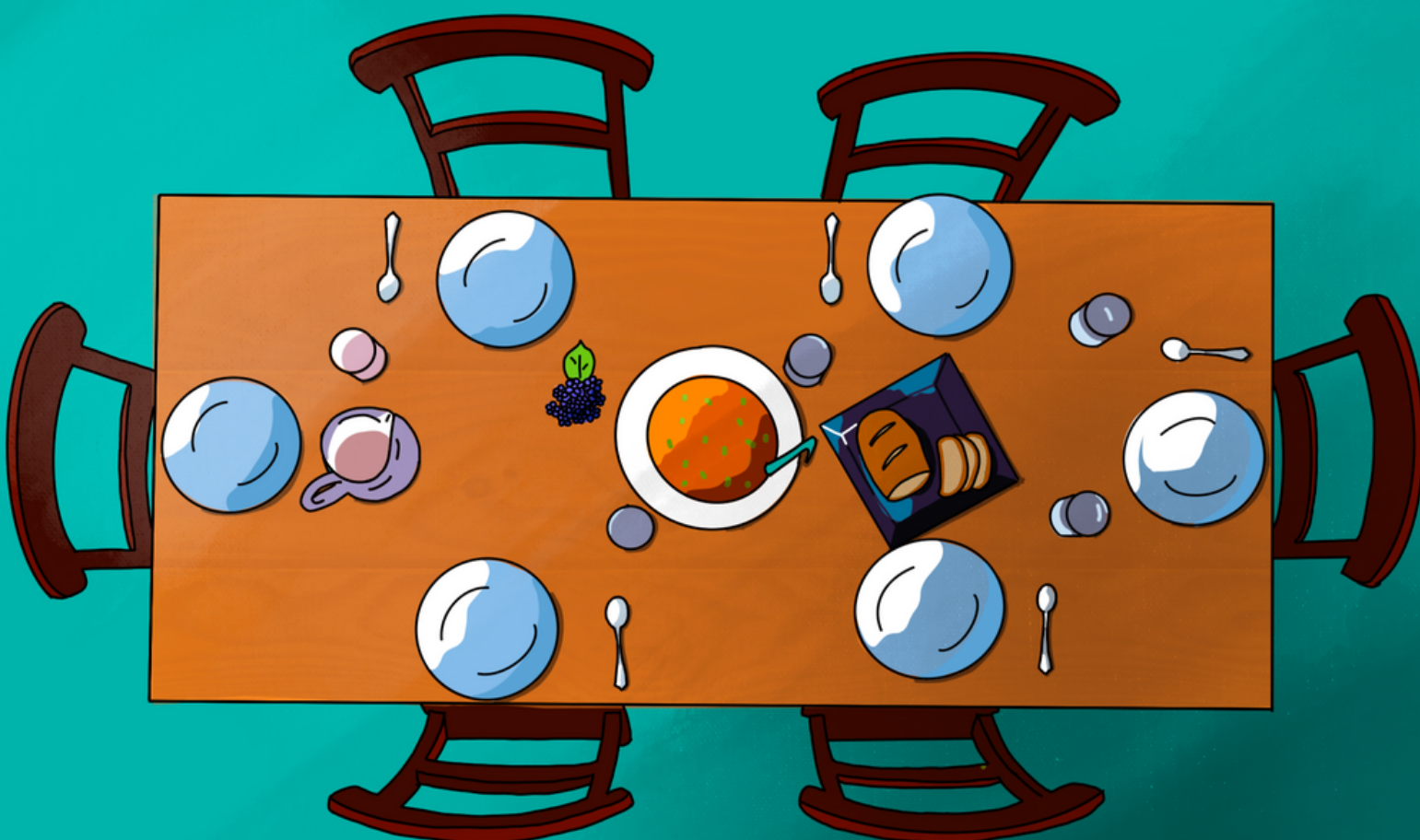
This material is part of the "[INTERSECT - Changing the narrative of discrimination](#)" project, coordinated by the Centre for Legal Resources (CLR), in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Action Centre (ACTEDO), MozaiQ LGBT Association and the Civic Union of Roma Youth in Romania (UCTRR).

TELL US A FEW THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF, your childhood and family.

My name is Adina, I live in Timișoara and I have four children. At this moment I am by myself with my children because my husband is incarcerated. Two of the children are in school and I'm going to enrol the other two soon. I can't read or write... I admit it, I didn't go to school. It's my parents' fault because they didn't send me to school, but I'm owning it.

I never managed to get a job with an employment contract, but I did work in the market before, I also helped around when people needed an extra hand. But never with an employment contract because they said we must be able to read, to sign in and log in how many hours we stayed at work... It wasn't just me, a lot of Roma people from Timișoara are complaining that nobody gives them a job because they don't know how to read and write.

It's a little bit difficult for me right now because we're renting a place. Up until last year, we lived in an abandoned building, and it was great for us because we didn't pay, so money wasn't as tight, but they kicked us out.





WHERE DID YOU LIVE THEN AND HOW WERE YOU EVICTED?

Last year, before the pandemic, we lived in an abandoned building; we were more than 10 adults with 5-6 children per family. We were all Roma, those of us living there, except one older woman, who was Romanian. One day, the police came and gave us a one month eviction notice and when that month passed, they kicked us out, so we ended up on the street with all the children and luggage. But we didn't take many things with us because we had nowhere to take them to. I can never forget how they put some large chains and padlocks on the gate... The mayor, some policemen and special intervention forces showed up because some of us started to scream and cry. We lived there for ten years; an Italian man owned the house. There were many children and old people, but the gendarmes came, closed the gates and we were kicked to the curb with whatever we could grab and each of us went wherever we could. We left, we couldn't do anything about it. It was not our propriety, but we lived there for ten years. When we were evicted, Robu* [the mayor at the time] came and called us "parasites", he told us he didn't need our votes. A whole country saw that video. If he had treated us appropriately, we would have done the same thing; we would have spoken to him nicely. But when he entered the yard, he called us "g*****s", he said we didn't want to work and stuff like this...

After that, each of us looked for a place to live; it was hard because I am Roma and also because of the pandemic most people didn't want to take us in. They were scared and they thought they will have problems with other neighbours on the property. Wherever you go and they see you are „g***y” (they do not even call you "Roma", they say g***y), people don't talk nice... Eventually, some landlords agreed because we could pay our rent. Now it's much better.

* Nicolae Robu, mayor of Timișoara from 2011 to 2021. He was mayor during the eviction that Adina mentions.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND AND HOW HE GOT IN PRISON?

We went through very difficult times last year, when nobody would help us when we had the problem with my husband [referring to the prison sentence], probably because we are "g*****s" and they thought we were lying. I said I would answer anyone's questions and I even agreed to take a lie detector test to prove that my husband is innocent. They took my husband to court and there, since he was g****y, the prosecutor looked at him and asked if he was guilty. He said: "I am not guilty, my brother is the one who did it". And the fault fell on him because he looked like his brother. It was a case of mistaken identity. Someone gave me some money and I paid for a lawyer, but in court, they it still didn't matter. This is what I believe... I can't convince myself otherwise. Because my husband agreed to a liar detector test, he asked for the cameras in the area to be checked from the day of the offence, so they could see that it was his brother who committed the burglary, not him. Now he did his sentence, he has one month left and he will be coming home. I was distraught; I struggled a lot with 4 children by myself. He was our help in the house, he worked in construction and helped us with anything we needed, and he was our support. This is what I realized, they didn't pay attention to us because they saw us as g*****s. I can't believe anything else...

Three months ago my husband got COVID in the penitentiary and they took him to the Jilava Hospital. When they brought him there, they called me and told me that he got infected with COVID and they were transferring him to the hospital. When I heard that, I got very upset, I didn't know any details. A neighbour helped me browse on the Internet, she put in „Jilava Hospital" so I could find a telephone number to call and find out details about my husband. I couldn't go there with 4 children. When I called, I told them my husband's name, that he got infected and was sent from Timișoara and I asked what was wrong with him and how was he feeling. They told me that they couldn't tell me anything at that moment and to call back later. I called back after 2 hours and they hung up on me. They said nobody told me to call back.

After that, I called here, at the penitentiary (in Timișoara) and they didn't know anything either because they had transferred him. No one really paid attention to me. I went to their gate, but they didn't pay attention to me. I was left without any help or information about my husband; I didn't know how he was doing. And then, a Romanian boy I know called and inquired about my husband and he got all the information. While I didn't get anything from them. Because... I don't know, I am g***y and I can't speak Romanian well, or I don't know... They told that boy everything: that my husband was there, he was doing fine, even that he was infected with Covid. And the boy told me where he was, through him I find out everything.

DID YOU MANAGE TO TALK WITH YOUR HUSBAND? HOW IS HE FEELING?

Is he out of hospital now?

Yes, he is out, they transferred him back here, in Timișoara. He gave them the address where his family lived, just in case, so they would know where to send details about him. And I received from the Health Ministry in Bucharest a document saying he had been infected with Covid in the penitentiary. They got the people out of the penitentiary for community work and that's how he got infected. They brought him back, he is ok now. When he came back he was still on treatment, he was on a certain diet, but now he is well. He got the first jab of the vaccine and is waiting for the second shot.



BESIDES THIS EXPERIENCE, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY THE POLICE AND THE AUTHORITIES TREAT YOU IN GENERAL?

I've been to the police before, for my husband even, but they don't pay attention to us. They even laugh at us. Because they consider we don't know where to go or on what doors to knock to get to them. They don't know we have a right to live too, that's the way they think. When I came out with the children, I took all of them with me, because they are underage, and I have no one to leave them with at home. I went to the penitentiary to make an appointment to see my husband. It's true, it was not ok that I took all the children with me and that I went out on the street with four small kids during a pandemic. I admit it. We were even in lockdown. But I had no one to leave them with. And on the way, the police stopped me and told me that I was not allowed to do this and if I got caught again, I would be fined, but they were letting me go with just a warning. I told them that I had no one to watch them while I was gone because I was by myself, my husband was locked up. The cops started laughing, they didn't care...

I've never gotten in trouble with the police, because I don't go anywhere, I'm always with the children around the house. It was only when I went out on the street since the pandemic started. But otherwise, at that place where we lived with several residents, it's true, they were sometimes getting in arguments, getting in fights, so the neighbours would call the police. That's when we would go out of the house, we were called as witnesses because we saw what happened in the common yard. We went and told them who was responsible because you have to defend the innocent. The cops started laughing, telling us that we were all to blame, taking us all to the police station and giving us fines. Absolutely everyone. If one of the people got in trouble in the common yard and the neighbours called the cops, they would take us all to the police station. They would say we were lying, that they didn't believe us. They would take us all, put us in police vans and take us to the station, there they would ask us questions, give us fines and then let us go. I don't even remember how many times they've taken me too... I haven't seen a single policeman to treat us, the Roma people, ok. They behave towards us as if we have no place in the world. This is how they think... that we're not human and that we're not ok. But there are many Roma who are very ok people.

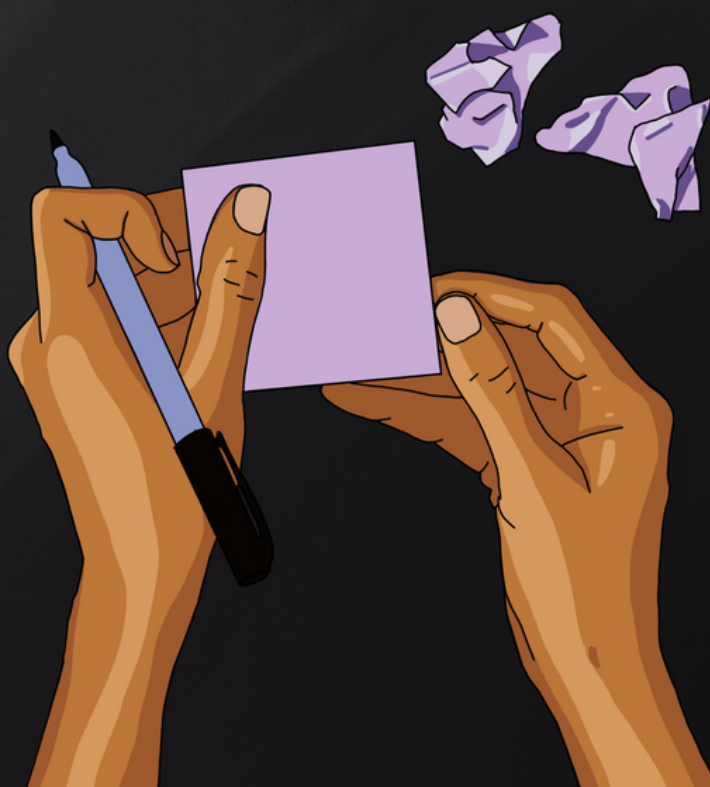
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ADINA \ \ ROMA WOMAN

Even when I go to the town hall, they don't pay attention to us. I went to the town hall to submit the forms for social assistance, so I can get a document showing that I have no income and to be able to get welfare, and also the school that my children attend required this paper from me. I stayed at the town hall's gate for an hour or so until someone came out to fill out a form for me, without it you're not allowed to get inside. I kindly asked the lady guard to fill it out for me. She said "I'm not allowed to touch it, you need to write it". I said, "Ma'am, I can't write, what should I do?!" I said I could go back outside to have someone fill it out and she said "others are not allowed to do it for you". But I finally asked a woman and she wrote it for me. And no... I was not allowed back in for another hour and a half.

Other times, when I went, I asked others and they helped us. They still laughed at us, they asked us why we didn't go to school... we would tell them our parents were to blame. They didn't believe it... When I went to the penitentiary, I had to write a statement on oath that I hadn't left the country, that I didn't have COVID. I saw a young guy and I asked him if he could help me fill out my piece of paper and he said, "Why? Didn't you go to school? ". I said, "I didn't, my mom and dad didn't send me to school, it's not my fault, it's my parents' fault.". And he said, "Sure... It's not the parents' fault!" I went to school all by myself. ". He was laughing at me... How can you go to school by yourself at the age of 7?! I told him, "Did you enrol in school by yourself too?" and he said yes. I said "Okay, thank you very much...", what else could I have said? He was making fun of me...



WHAT WERE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH DOCTORS OR MEDICAL STAFF?

I went to see a dentist at the emergency room two weeks ago. And they didn't pay attention to me. I went with all four children and they said they would call the police. I said, "Ma'am, why would you call the police, I don't even know how to write? My tooth is hurting really bad, please do something about it". She said to take a form, go home, fill it out and come back with it. And I said my boy could do it right there. But she said, "No, no, you're not doing anything here. Go home and come with the form filled out". And that was it with the tooth ... I went to the pharmacy, they gave me an antibiotic and I took it. I didn't know if I needed it or not, but I took it.

Now, during these times, you can sit outside and wait and no one pays attention to you. And they don't let you inside the building if you don't know how to write a statement. So there's no point in going. I stay at home and go to the pharmacy... if I have money, I buy, if not, I stay home.

Or another example, not long ago, my little girl had high fever - 40.1 degrees, I went to the hospital with her that night and they hospitalized us. They tested us for COVID and it came out negative. My little girl just had cold and strep throat. When they hospitalized us, they put us in one of those temporary ambulatories/makeshift exam rooms and locked us in there, without me knowing it. The doctors came and brought me a bottle of water and told me that if I needed anything else or, God forbid, if my little girl's fever went up, to give them a call. My problem was this: I didn't know how to measure the fever. They gave me a thermometer and I told them I didn't know [how to use it]. I put my hand on her and when I felt she was burning, I would pick up the phone and call. And they would come if I called. I didn't know I was locked in there. I waited and waited and I got up and tried the door. And when I saw the door was locked, and I saw myself alone in there with my little girl, and all those doctors were wearing masks on their faces, and medical body suits, I got very scared. I got so frightened that I lost it. I had the feeling that my heart was beating very fast, that I was out of breath, that I was dying... I couldn't do it anymore. I was so scared...

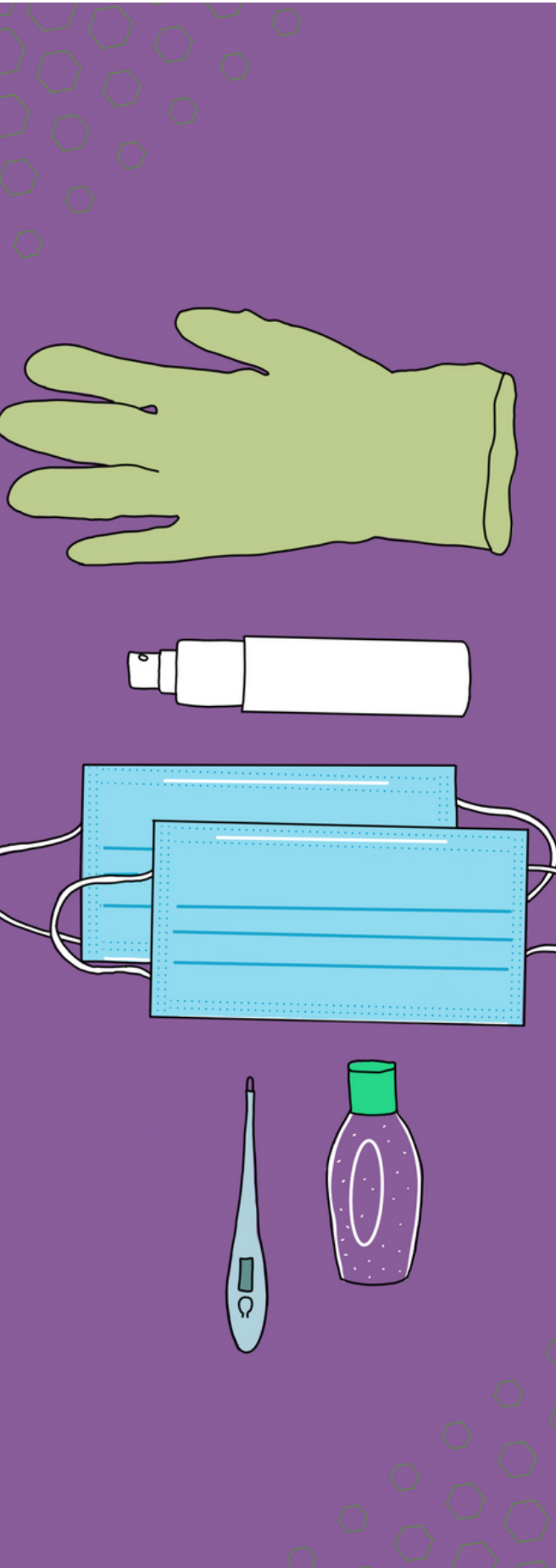
DID ANY OF YOUR RELATIVES OR ACQUAINTANCES EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE THEY ARE ROMA?

Yes, I have a sister who has many children and she's been through a lot; she's not well seen in her village, because well... she is g**y, she's not Romanian. She is almost the only g**y in the village. Yes, they're respectful of her, but they don't really consider her ok because she's Roma. And the children, when summer comes, can't really play outside, because the Romanian children make fun of them since they're g****s. They sometimes go out barefoot or naked in the summer when it is hot. The comments towards them, towards all of us are bad, but we hope to get over these things and be the way God left us. Let's thank the Lord for everything. And if others come and make any comments, we won't pay attention to them. It's in vain to give importance to people like that, there's no point to it. Those who want to talk nicely to us, we are willing to talk nicely with them too. I know many Romanians who speak very nicely with us.



HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

One of the problems is that we can't get out of the house. Sometimes I don't leave the house, because 3 months ago I got a fine for not knowing how to write one of those statements. I can't leave the house... and I have four children to feed. There is no one to bring me food, I'm alone with them. I can't go around with a statement written by someone else because I can't even trust what's written on it. A week ago they caught me [on the street] and told me that if I get caught again, I'll be fined. I don't have money to pay [these fines] and instead of getting in trouble, I stay home, so when a neighbour passes by, I ask them to buy something from me. I even cried in front of the cops, I told them I'm Roma and I can't read or write and I asked them nicely to consider that I don't know how to make that statement. I have neighbours in the building who don't want to write a statement for me because they don't want this statement to be on their responsibility. And I was told that if I went out again, I'd get a fine. So I really don't go out anymore, I stay in because I'm Roma and I can't read and write.



WHAT DO YOU THINK THE STATE, THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, THE AUTHORITIES SHOULD DO TO MAKE YOUR LIFE AS A ROMA WOMAN EASIER AND TO FEEL THAT YOU HAVE THE SAME CHANCES AS ANY OTHER PERSON?

They should give housing and a chance to work to all the Roma people living in abandoned buildings, living outside with small children or living in houses without electricity, water, houses that are not theirs, but belong to others, people who take them in out of pity. That way they can make a living everyone else.

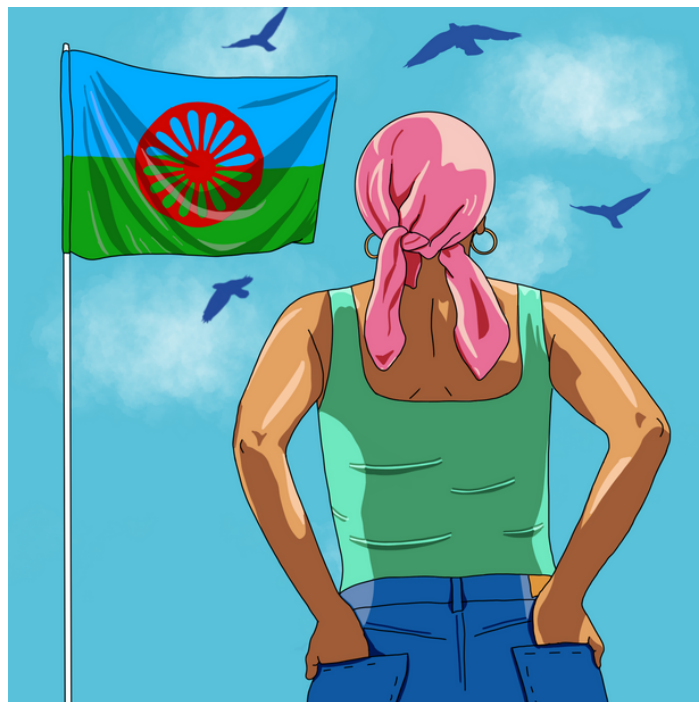
WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF THOSE AROUND YOU? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED?

We, Roma people, want the world to treat us like they treat Romanians. Because we are all human and it doesn't even say on our identity card that we are Roma. I would like people to stop talking about Roma with hatred. There are many Roma people with kind heart... They are not all the same, you can't compare all people. I apologize for saying this and maybe offending someone, but not all Romanians are the same either. Same goes for Roma people. My family and I, and others too, would be happy if Romanians would treat us as they do their own.

This material „Adina's Story” is part of the "[INTERSECT - Changing the narrative of discrimination](#)" project, coordinated by the Centre for Legal Resources (CLR), in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Action Centre (ACTEDO), MozaiQ LGBT Association and the Civic Union of Roma Youth in Romania (UCTRR).

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