



DANIEL'S STORY

GAY ROMA



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).

In the Romanian version of the interview, throughout the transcript, the word 'Rom' (Roma) is used with the spelling 'Rrom' per Daniel's request, who uses the term and its variations with double 'r'.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

Can you introduce yourself?

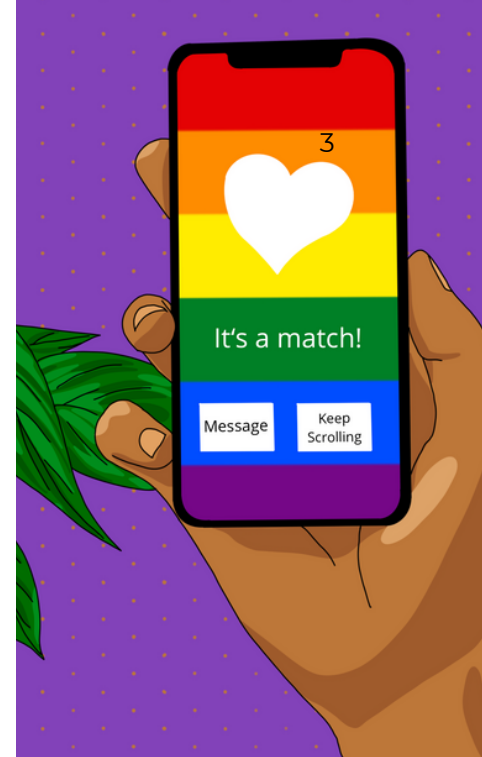
I'm 22 years old, I'm enrolled in two universities, I work as a cashier in a mall and I have been living in Bucharest for the past 4 years. I am part of the Roma community and part of the LGBT community - I'm gay.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN SITUATIONS WHERE YOU WERE ILL-TREATED, DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF YOUR ETHNICITY OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

I have never been discriminated against because I am LGBT and I hope I won't be in the future either. But ethnically, yes, I have been discriminated against. In the academic environment, at my first university, I was the only Roma person in the study group. Some of my class mates found out I was taking up one of the slots allocated to Roma people and one of the girls, who couldn't stand me and used to pick on me, would always ask why I got into this university, why I wasn't admitted based on my grades...

One time, at the same university, I was in front of the class to solve a Math problem. And the professor asked: 'Listen, did you even pass the Math Baccalaureate? What was your grade?' Of course I passed the exam; I wouldn't have been in university otherwise. Then she told me to go back to my seat. I kept trying to answer during the lesson because there were questions I knew the answer to. Math and I don't normally mix well, but at that time I was the only one in the classroom who understood the assignment, and I wanted to answer. I kept raising my hand and she kept saying 'Anybody else? Anybody else?' And she couldn't get anyone else to answer, because no one wanted to, but she did not want to pick me either.

Again ethnically speaking, on a dating app for gay people, I was discriminated against by someone from the LGBT community. We kept chatting, then we exchanged photos to which they said that if I were a little whiter, they would go out on a date with me, but not in this situation... because they do not like darker-skinned people. That was embarrassing and made me feel awful. As you can imagine, your self-esteem starts to drop slowly with each situation like this. These are just a few examples that left a mark and I can still remember.



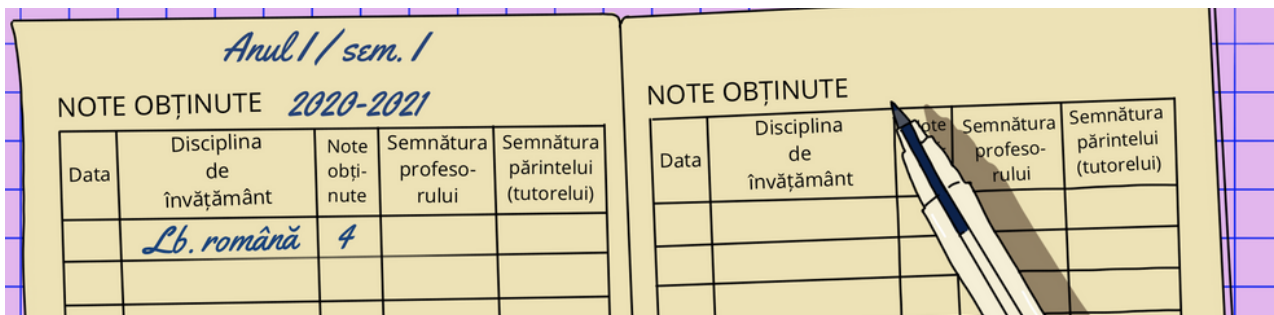
HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED FEELING THAT THE PEOPLE AROUND ARE TREATING YOU DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF YOUR ETHNICITY OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

In the village I am from, we are split in areas. On one side, there are the Roma people and on the other side, the Gadjó (the non-Roma, Romanians). Primary school and kindergarten are in our area, but the secondary school is on the other side. Us, Roma people, would go to school on the other side, where we would always be placed in the class considered to be the lowest in terms of academic achievements. There were 3 classrooms - A, B, and C - and we were placed in C. They would always treat us differently... they would say 'You are from classroom C'. All of us from that class were part of the Roma community.

I think this one was discrimination as well... I was in 6th grade and a girl hit her leg, someone tripped her or something and she got hurt. I was in the bathroom at that moment, rinsing the sponge for the blackboard. . And they blamed me, they said I did that. Our tutor started calling me names when I had nothing to do with it. I didn't even know her name or who she was. The next day, the girl's father came to school and said I was coming from the g***y ghetto and making a big fuss in their area. And I had no idea who she was, I didn't do anything wrong. But they blamed me... randomly. This was on the ethnic side.

From the LGBT perspective, since primary school I had some... feminine gestures, and the boys there would always call me 'girlie'. There is also another funny but embarrassing thing. In the evening, when I would finish classes, Romanians would come and touch my butt. I literally cannot believe this... I was in 5th or 6th grade for things like this to happen...

Then, in high school I was discriminated against both based on ethnicity as well as religion, because I was also born in a different religion. I was not going out with the kids, I would keep to myself, and they would laugh at me because I did not do the things they were doing. And since I was Roma, I had to always be alone. I had two other friends who transferred from a different high school, like I transferred from another one there, and all three of us were united, as we were the only Roma people in that class.

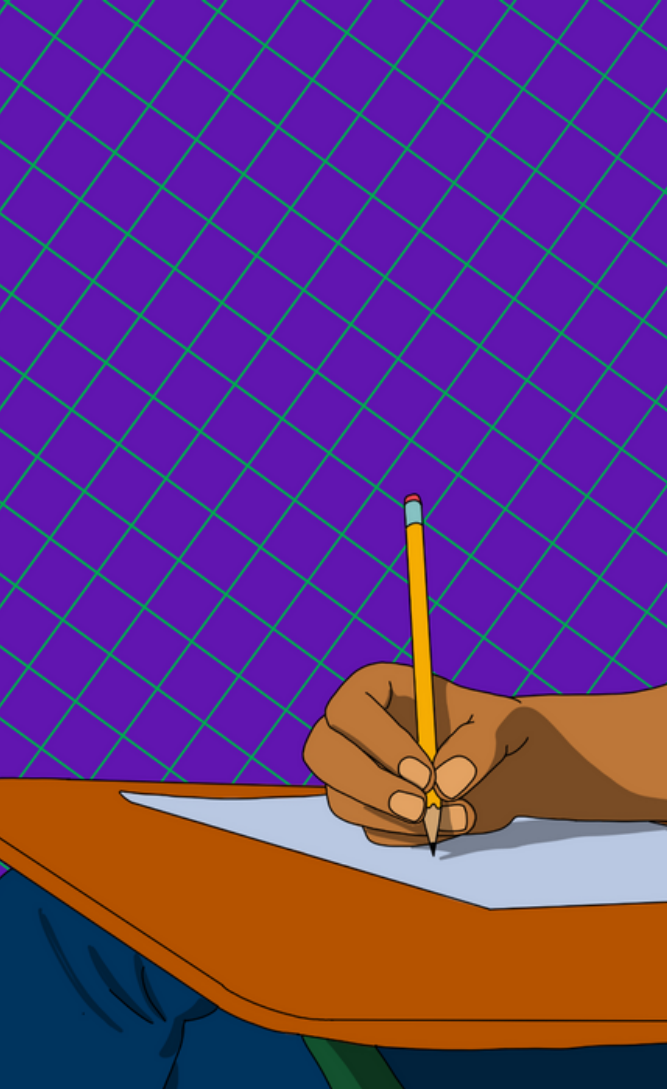


HOW IS YOUR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE?

Do you feel it is more difficult for you, compared to your peers, to make friends or to get good grades?

Yes... at the university I'm finishing now, in my 1st year Romanian Language course, there was me and another 3 Roma students. We were the only ones who failed the class. I did not understand why, because my paper was good enough to get a passing grade, but the professor flunked us. Everyone else passed. I contested the grade, but it was marked F again because the same professor graded it. Then I went to retake the test and right from the beginning the professor said 'You are the boy who contested your grade, right? I'm giving you an F on this, just so you know'. So retaking the exam, I was given a F again. All of us almost needed to retake the class because of that Professor.

The 2nd year, I took the exam again with the 1st year students and my paper was not a D paper. I worked very hard for that test... my paper should have been at least worth a B. But she gave me a D, just good enough to pass. Now, in my 3rd year, she is my Professor for two more semesters, different course, and she made me retake the exam for this one too. Everybody else passed, aside from me and another classmate who is also Roma, but he dropped the class. I am the only one left there who still has to retake it in the summer. So, history is repeating itself. But there is nothing I can do... If I say something bad now, if I complain or anything, she will be my Professor again for my Master classes, so it will be the same thing. I just hope that in the end she will let me pass.



HOW ABOUT YOUR CURRENT JOB?

Do you feel it is a more inclusive environment?

No... At my workplace, in my first day there, my boss said she 'hates the Jews more than she hates g****s'. Me, being Roma, and she said this thing to me... I was... shocked. So I responded with 'You are racist, how can you say such a thing?'. And she said 'Do you think that if I were a racist, I would have hired you at this store?' I told them that if they kept using the term 'g***y' in front of me, I can go to CNCD (*National Council for Combating Discrimination, the Equality Body in Romania) to file a complaint for discrimination at the workplace. I let them know from the beginning to never use this term in front of me, because it is offensive, it has a pejorative meaning. Now they toned it down and stopped using this term when I am around. They still make mistakes on occasion, but I overlook them, it is not as bad as it was at the beginning.

During the hiring process, I didn't have an issue. However, I am not extremely open and it isn't obvious when it comes to my sexual orientation. I'm not open about it because it's not seen as a good thing in my chosen career and I am trying to be as discreet as I can be. If someone asks, I tell them I'm gay, I don't lie about it or anything like that. I found jobs quite easily, it was really OK. In fact, I experienced more discrimination in school and in the LGBT community.

HAVE YOU EVER TAKEN LEGAL ACTION FOR ANY DISCRIMINATORY ACT?

No, I have not. If at work they would have continued to use that term around me, I would have gone to CNCD to file a complaint, but it was not needed – because they understood and had the decency to stop using it when I am around.

HOW WAS YOUR COMING OUT EXPERIENCE?

When I was 15, I could not accept the idea. I had known for a long time that I liked boys, but I couldn't accept it. Being from a different religion, I simply could not. I wanted to commit suicide because of this, I wanted to hang myself. My mother saw me when I was walking to the backyard where I was planning to do this crazy thing – I don't have these thoughts anymore. She asked me what was up, because she felt something was wrong. I couldn't even say the word, couldn't say 'gay' or 'homosexual' or 'f***t' or anything. I asked for a pen and paper to write it down for her. She called my father, we walked inside the house to talk. He asked me why I think I am this way. I could not tell them I wanted to have sex with a man; instead I said I sometimes check out boys walking by. They said it is normal, they also check out people on the street to see how they're dressed and stuff.

Then they asked me if I want to have sex with a man and I said no. But in my mind, it was a yes. They said that even if I wanted to, or not, I was neither the first nor the last one and that they will love me no matter what, because I was their child. So we left it at “it is a just a phase”.

During this time, I had a relationship with a girl, but I didn't feel attracted to her. It was more for others to see. Three years ago I was abroad with my sister and I got depressed. I was crying at night. I would leave work at 2a.m., go home, take a shower, then go outside at the park where I would cry and scream. It lasted for several days. I would not eat... I just couldn't accept who I was, I couldn't. My sister didn't know how to help me, so she called our mom. I told her 'Do you remember the thing I we talked about a few years ago? This is what it's about...'. To which she replied 'And that's a reason to cry for?' I said yes, I asked her if she would still love me and she said 'Don't be silly! Of course I will continue to love you, you are my child'. However, my dad didn't speak to me for a short period of time, about a month. He would ask my mom and sister all the time how I was doing. I still felt bad, because I was living with my sister and he would call her, not me. He called me on my birthday though. Then, when I moved back to Romania, so did they, , because they were also living abroad. Since then, our relationship got much stronger. We get along really well now, I get along with both of them and we haven't had a fight since. I am a momma's and daddy's boy anyway, but now I cannot even fathom the thought of us not speaking, we get along really well. They call me all the time and we chat. My mom calls me daily and now so does my dad, and he didn't use to do that before, but now he does. So it was a fortunate case. Well, my father still tells me from time to time that I should find a girl. Like any parent, he is hoping... but that will not be the case.

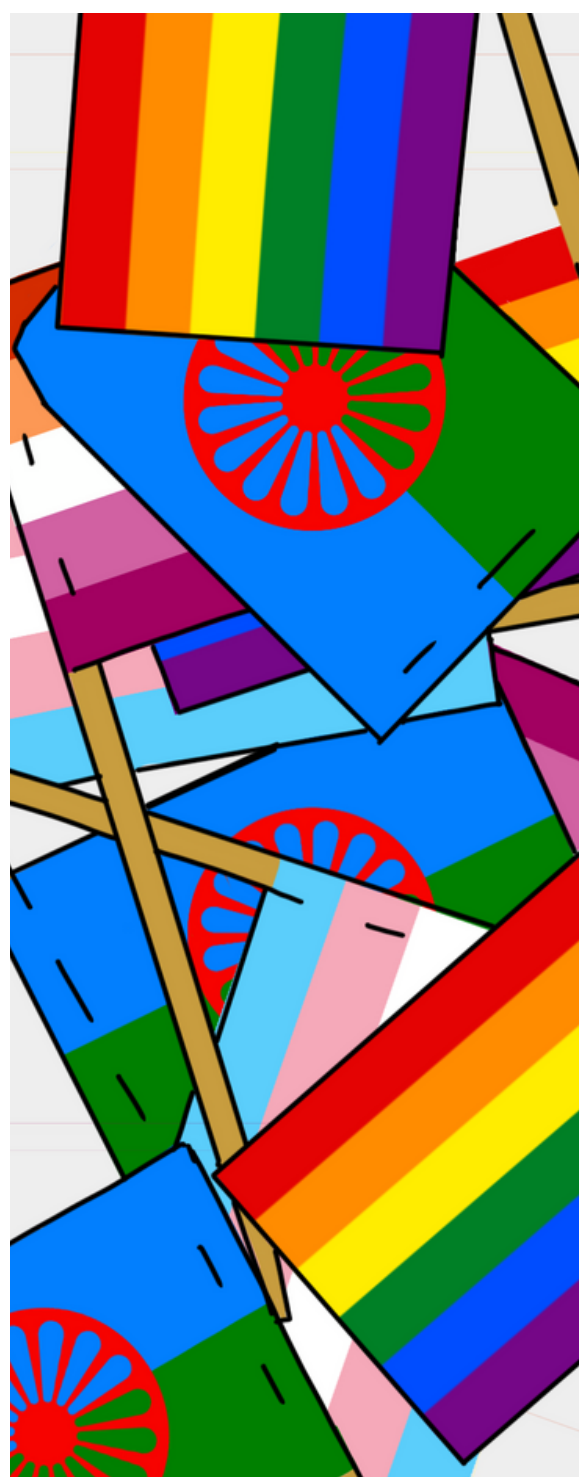


DO YOU FEEL ACCEPTED BY THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY FOR BEING ROMA?

What about the Roma community for being LGBTQ?

Not entirely. About 50-50. It's like I told you about that person I chatted with who said that if I were a little whiter, we would have gone out. I also got random texts from people saying: 'you are a n****r', 'I'd kill you all'. People I haven't even talked to before, they just decided out of the blue to message me on the app. So I can't say I'm entirely accepted, maybe 50-50. For example, my best friend is Gadjo, Romanian, and we get along great; discrimination has never been a thing with him. But it depends on the person, on their mentality. An example I always use is: if out of 10 Roma people, 9 are doctors, professors, lawyers, but one is a thief, the people's reaction is 'Goddamn g****s, look at what they have done'. But if it is the other way around and the person is Romanian, they say 'goddamn person', there is no generalisation.

From the other perspective, I'm not part of a traditional family, so I can't say I'm not accepted within my immediate family. My sister knows I'm gay and she accepts me for who I am. Having said that, other members of the family don't know, like my grandparents, aunts... They don't know and most likely won't find out anytime soon. So I don't really have an answer to this question.



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DANIEL \\ GAY ROMA

HOW DO YOU FEEL ROMA PEOPLE AND LGBTQ PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

As I've noticed during the pandemic, even Băsescu [former president of Romania] would talk about g****s in public and the media. If you say something about g****s, it automatically must be something shady, they must have done something bad. That's why I try my best to avoid these environments. You don't get a good image... Especially because, for example, I'm confronted with double discrimination for being gay and also Roma. I'm not full Roma, but I say I am. Discrimination comes from two sides and it's hard. No matter what, you don't get a good image. I would sometimes hear while riding the metro how some people talk about g****s, 'goddamn g***y, look at what he did'. I couldn't hear more [of the conversation], I just heard the term and it felt... terrible. But I am trying to distance myself as much as I can.



People should change their way of thinking, be more open-minded. After all, aren't we all people? Let me give you an example. M&M candy - when you eat them, they taste the same, have the same texture, the same peanut in the middle, they taste good. But outside, their colour is different: some are red, others green, some blue. It does not matter what you look like on the outside, what matters is what is on the inside. That is what people should think about. It does not matter what you look like on the outside or what your sexual orientation is or what ethnicity is. What matters is who you are as a person. If, for instance, I turn out to be great in my chosen career what difference does it make to you whether I am Roma or gay, when I do my job really well and have great results?

CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF YOUR POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AS A ROMA GAY MAN?

Having fun at the club. Before I moved to Bucharest, in my old town, I would always stay in, study, and I wasn't very open when it came to my gay side. Here in Bucharest, I started being more open-minded and more outgoing. I started having fun. At the same time, I volunteered with an organisation that helps gay, trans and Roma people get [free] STD tests. Being gay myself, it helped me get to know more people, become part of something, and make connections within the organisation. Now, with the INTERSECT project and with MozaiQ, I didn't know anything about them before I took part in different projects and I also I earned some money. But I didn't do it for the money, I was more focused on getting involved in activities, meeting new people - and I've met wonderful people with whom I still talk going out; I managed to learn new things and develop as a person. So, if my ethnicity was not Roma and if I were outside of the LGBT community, I would not have had this opportunity.



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Project funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union (2014-2020).
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