

Towards a more holistic approach to Roma inclusion and Antigypsyism in the EU: stronger policy mainstreaming and focus

By the Alliance against Antigypsyism

The most marginalised and one of the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, are the Roma people, with approximately 6 million living the EU1. According to the EU MIDIS II report from the Fundamental Rights Agency published in 2016, **80% of Roma still live below the country-specific risk of poverty** line in all EU Member States. Moreover, they face discrimination in education, labour market, health and housing.

The current 2014-2020 multi-annual framework put forward new measures with a wider scope for improving the situation of such groups, including an investment priority targeting marginalised communities, youth and vulnerable groups. The international institutions and stakeholders argue that a mainstream approach across all the policies areas should be taken, to achieve lasting structural changes for a better cohesion, social inclusion and improvement of the life of the Roma.

Roma got a special policy focus and attention in 2011 thanks to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. This policy became an important tool for the member states to include Roma in their countries. The Framework has connections with other policies and funds in order to ensure policy alignment, investment and delivery of progress. The question is to know whether these connections have been sufficient enough to make a change in the lives of Roma and if not, how they can be strengthened and improved in the next post-2020 EU Roma Framework and the new European Union Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 by providing specific recommendations on how the next process should look like.

1. Need for stronger policy mainstreaming of Roma inclusion in existing EU policies initiatives

The EU is currently recovering from an economic and social crisis which has had important consequences on the economic growth and social inclusion of Member States. The last programming period was mostly focusing on the use of meaningful investment aimed to address unemployment, social challenges, poverty reduction and economic growth.

The 2020 Agenda, adopted in 2010 had ambitious targets including: **75% people aged 20-60** to be employed; rates of early school leavers below 10%; at least 40% of people aged 30-34 having completed higher education; at least **20 million fewer people** in /or at risk of / poverty/social exclusion.

However the 2020 agenda failed to reach its objectives: **18 million people still at risk or poverty and exclusion; social inequalities are higher** than before.

Moreover, there are no indicators of progress about the specific situation of Roma when it comes to the 2020 targets, although data show that they are in the most precarious situation in Europe.

¹ Fundamental Rights Agency:
<http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/roma>

In order to achieve its goals under the Agenda 2020, the European Commission created new initiatives to foster the social inclusion process and achieve the targets under the current multiannual budget 2014-2020.

One of the most important initiative that was developed to reach the most deprived and those far from the labour market was the **Youth Guarantee** complemented in 2013 by the Youth Employment Initiative. It remains one of the most important EU financial resource to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme aimed to reach to those who are not in school neither in employment and create specific tailored trainings in order to give access to the labour market for youth.² However, In the European Parliament's report on the Youth Initiative implementation assessment 2017, it is revealed that the program itself did not reach the vulnerable groups, and more specifically the Roma.

According to the FRA report EU MIDIS II³ and the International Labour Organization⁴, Roma still do not benefit from mainstream EU policies for employment. Due to the poor education that many of them received they cannot enter the labour market and they continue to live on the edge of poverty while suffering from discrimination and exclusion that are driven by Antigypsyism. The **European Social Pillar of Social Rights⁵ (ESPR)** is an initiative for Members States to monitor to what extent the social rights both at EU and National level are implemented. This enriches and enforces the promotion and implementation of the human-rights approach included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The implementation of the 20 principles under the Social Pillar are vital for the Roma communities since they experience open racial hatred in several countries and the antigypsyist acts are still very present and even on the rise in some countries.

It is still unclear how the EPSR will really impact the European Semester and the priorities of Member States when it comes to social and employment policies. The consultation is ongoing at EU level on how to link the EPSR and EU Semester. At national level, the Member States have to propose how to implement the Pillar in which specific focus should be given to the vulnerable such as the Roma.

The European Semester promotes reforms of mainstream policies and support Roma inclusion.

In the last years (2012-2017) the EC proposed Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) which the Council adopted. They were all focusing on education and employment issues that Roma people face. The need to submit the same CSR yearly clearly shows the lack of investment when it comes to implementation, administrative capacity and commitment of national governments. CSR relevant to Roma are limited to projects under the **European Social Fund (ESF)**.

There is a different approach for the **three countries that got infringements related to discrimination in education (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia)**. These countries try

² Council of the European Union (2013), Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013/C 120/01), 22 April 2013.

³ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/roma-education-to-employment>

⁴ ILO (International Labour Organization) (2017), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future*, Report, Geneva, ILO.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

to tackle the implementation of CSR through legislative reforms. However, the efforts are not yet visible.

Even though the European Semester and CRS have so far demonstrated that they are strong tools to put pressure on Member States to tackle the challenges in education, they are equally showing a limitation of the European Semester approach. Indeed, the European Commission considers a progress has been made when the measures are adopted at legislative level, without taking into account the implementation status of the specific measures (Czech Republic). Moreover, the CSRs have mainly focused on education and no other areas of social exclusion.

One of the main factors which show the limits of the CSR is the fact that the Roma references are just sub-components of the main CSR on education. This has the consequence to practically imposes on the EC to access generally the CSRs without looking specifically on the progress achieved on the Roma measures.

2. Need for a stronger EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in connection with mainstream policies under the next MFF

2011 has certainly been a major year for Roma inclusion in the European Union with the adoption of EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (the 'EU Roma Framework').

The European Commission called for the Framework and urged all the EU Member States to create and implement suitable national strategies for improving the situation of Roma, considering this as "a social and economic imperative for the Union and its Member States" (EC, 2011:2). These strategies are supposed to focus on four areas, education, health, housing and employment, with a particular attention on the cross-cutting issues of discrimination and funding. In order to achieve full integration of Roma, the European Commission asked Member States to design specific measures and national strategies while taking a **mainstream approach** and to make use of the EU funds for Roma inclusion⁶. Given the slow implementation and lack of progress during the 2014-2020 period the European Commission urged Member States to ensure that the European Semester will have a **strong linkage between policy and funding priorities**⁷. This was supposed to guarantee the implementation of the Country Specific recommendations and the mainstream policies by improving the policy reforms.

No significant impact on the situation of Roma on the ground

The Court of Auditors' report⁸ points out that there has been a progress in setting the EU policy initiatives aimed to support Roma Inclusion. However, there are specific problems related to mainstreaming Roma inclusion in the general policies. Moreover, EU funds⁹ have been misused in some projects that actually perpetuated social exclusion of Roma. According to the Court, the main factor is that Antigypsyism¹⁰ - concept that analyses racism against Roma as structural in

⁶ Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies (SWD) 2017

⁷ Ibid

⁸ EN 2016, no. 14 Court of Auditors http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_14/SR_ROMA_EN.pdf

⁹ According to the Court of Auditors "around 1.5 billion euros has been earmarked for the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma during the 2014-2020 programme period"

¹⁰ <http://antigypsyism.eu/>

society – is not tackled, In 2018, discrimination continues to be widespread across the EU and Antigypsyism, hate speech and hate crime have been on the rise.

According to the latest Eurobarometer survey conducted in June 2015, 94% of the 28,000 European respondents said they would be at ease (83% comfortable, 11% indifferent) working with a white colleague. This proportion is 83% for working with a black person, 83% with an Asian and **only 63% with a Roma person.**

A research published in July 2016 carried out by Pew Research Center (Global Attitudes & Trends) concluded that negative views on minorities and refugees are common in the European Union. More specifically the groups **viewed more negatively are Roma and Muslims.** With the exception of Hungary, Spain and Poland, where Muslims are perceived more negatively than Roma **the unfavourable view on Roma is by far more predominant in EU with the worst ratings in Italy (82%), Greece (67%), France (61%) and Hungary (64%).**

According to the FRA EU MIDIS II survey published in 2016, **80% of Roma live** below the country-specific risk of poverty line in all EU Member States, meaning that Roma are one of the most affected vulnerable groups by poverty in the EU.

The European Commission's 2017 assessment of the NRIS implementation identified some positive trends, including the growing focus on early childhood education with encouraging results. In the area of employment, most strategies failed to achieve any significant progress since the barriers such as **lack of monitoring and discrimination have been insufficiently tackled.** The European Commission also mentions that the mainstream measures could better target Roma and that the “employment gap between men and women is not sufficiently addressed”.

3. Key recommendations for the post-2020 EU Framework for Roma inclusion and mainstream policies

- Extend the EU Framework on Roma inclusion for the period 2020-2030, with a holistic approach in the new MFF proposal ensuring that it is:
 - Strongly based on the principles of non-discrimination, equality and respect of fundamental rights
 - Specifically and visibly focusing on Antigypsyism, including hate speech and hate crime
 - Addressing the four key areas: education, employment, housing and healthcare
 - Focusing on social inclusion and equality
 - Making use of all available tools (policy, legal and financial)

Initiatives/Actions which should be taken by the European Commission

- Address Antigypsyism as a key priority of a post-2020 EU Roma-specific strategy. The renewed framework should include specific measures to respond to Antigypsyism and all its manifestations through the four different areas;
- Adopt EU standards for National Action Plans against Racism, ensuring that Antigypsyism is recognised and meaningfully addressed in national policies against racism;

- In the context of the EU's growth strategy, the European Union has set five ambitious objectives among which employment, education and social inclusion - to be reached by 2020. More emphasis should be given to Roma inclusion within the context of the European Semester after 2020;
- Effectively mainstream the principles of the Social Pillar in the European Semester, rebalancing social and economic priorities by including Roma inclusion as an indicator in the social scoreboard;
- Post-2020 European Social Funds' and European Regional Development Funds' regulations should maintain investment priorities, non-discrimination and Roma inclusion as specific objectives;
- An EU Roma Summit should be held once during each Commission mandate aiming at renewing the political commitment of Member States, taking stock of progress and holding accountable governments on delivery of results.

Initiatives/Actions which should be taken by Member States

- Include Roma inclusion and Antigypsyism as thematic priorities in mainstream policies at the national level, including in National action plans against racism;
- Ensure the active involvement of Roma and civil society organisations in the design, revision and implementation of the NRIS;
- Include Roma inclusion among the priorities in National Reform Programmes;
- Ensure measures taken that impact on Roma are in compliance with the principles of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Race Equality Directive and the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia;
- Ensure Country Specific Recommendations are reflected in NRIS with sufficient and adequate targets, implementation timeframe and budget allocation;
- Effectively mainstream the principles of the Social Pillar in the European Semester, rebalancing social and economic priorities;
- Improve mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation in order to guarantee that the funds are spent adequately and not misused to feed into situations of exclusion but invested to produce positive impact in Roma communities.

Initiatives which should be taken by the European Commission and the Member States

- Within the forthcoming post-2020 financial perspectives, adopt a more precise wording of the investment priority that allows better targeting of Roma among the beneficiaries of funds dedicated to the fight against social exclusion and Antigypsyism, as well as more accurate monitoring tools to ensure that the funds really benefit the Roma;
- Create funding programs that effectively address Antigypsyism and equal participation of Roma;
- The youth should be a priority of EU and national policies on Roma. Youth is the segment of Roma population with the greatest potential to bridge the gaps with the rest of the population and finally make Roma involved in matters that affect their future;
- Enhance the impact of the Youth Guarantee on Roma, who are identified as a target group for five countries¹¹. This initiative should be followed up after 2020. Opportunities under ERDF and EAFRD should be better promoted, in order to support the so needed integrated

projects in education-employment-housing-health, desegregation measures in education and housing or geographic targeting of deprived neighbourhoods;

- Increase and review communication and dissemination strategy about the Youth Guarantee to reach relevant targets in need;
- Improve the coordination with all relevant actors related to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee;
- Take into account specific obstacles of all target groups that could benefit from the Youth Guarantee in order to remove obstacles to their participation in the programme.

Conclusion

It has taken centuries for the exclusion of Roma to reach the levels of today and realistically it might take decades to reach a level of inclusion that can be considered as, at least, acceptable. The long -term perspective of the Roma inclusion process implies that, at this stage, expecting major socio-economic impact of the Roma integration process is premature. Although the necessary policies, tools and structures linked with the inclusion of Roma were put in place in the Member States, the actual implementation is still at an initial phase without mainstreaming them in the EU general policy initiatives