



Equal Citizenship and Policy Results **The EU Roma inclusion agenda 2015 - 2020**

February 2015

Roma face multi-layered and enduring discrimination in virtually all spheres of life. This is an EU wide phenomenon. The EU has asserted its strong commitment to tackling discrimination of Roma and promoting the use of all available instruments – at EU, national and local level – to promote social inclusion of Roma. Despite this strong commitment, there are unfortunately few signs of fundamental change for the better.

As an organization that connects organizations from the ground – where positive changes should become visible – ERGO Network suggests the EU agenda for Roma inclusion should reflect and tackle three main issues:

- the vulnerable position of Roma civil society;
- weak policy delivery;
- the pervasive and entrenched impact of anti-Gypsyism.

This note presents these in turn, along with a limited number of concrete proposals. Many other recommendations – in particular with regard to policy delivery – have been shared with the European Commission over the past years. Most recently, ERGO Network presented a set of recommendations related to integrated approaches, based on original research, which is annexed to this note.

An overarching matter is the present absence of a well-articulated EU agenda that addresses relative stagnation on the ground and reflects the worries shared by civil society in Europe. The issues we present here relate in various ways to the National Roma Integration Strategies. Despite the fact that these are unfortunately not performing well, we have a concern that the sense of urgency is diminishing. We believe it is therefore extremely important for the European Commission to create a renewed momentum and express its political commitment to ensure equal citizenship for Roma. We hope the present note may be of use in developing that agenda.

1. The crucial – but difficult – position of Roma civil society.

The capacity of Roma civil society to keep its issues on the agenda – especially at the national and local levels - is under pressure. This is among other reasons due to the fact that there is a strong squeeze on available funding for work that is not strictly oriented to the provision of social services: advocacy, watchdog work and civil society monitoring, community empowerment and rights based activism.

This is problematic because balanced policy development will be very difficult without an active and independent civil society. Change on the ground will only come about when Roma communities and organizations are capable of holding (local) governments accountable and involve themselves in policy processes. Roma civil society often does have necessary expertise to contribute to project design and implementation. But it is all too often not being

engaged or even acknowledged. As in most domains, Roma civil society has little choice other than to follow the priorities of funders. (Pro)-Roma organizations increasingly act as pure service providers, while organizations that present a critical voice are under strain.

With smart monitoring tools, communities can contribute to outcome evaluation and contribute to stronger commitment of stakeholders. But this requires dedicated and flexible funding. If policy makers value the contribution of civil society as respected partners in its policy dialogue and assessment, then we expect that EU policies will be more efficiently and effectively invested to make Roma equal citizens in their countries.

Recommendations:

- **Integrate 'community participation' in the policy framework, so that community development and empowerment actions become eligible for support. The active involvement of beneficiary communities should also become part of the evaluation framework. ERGO Network aims to present practicable community monitoring approaches and participation indicators in the first half of 2015.**
- **A specific EU fund or budget line should support empowerment and watchdog activities. Such support should be accessible for organizations representing any vulnerable group. Managed by the commission it should provide a long-term framework for support so as to ensure the independence of civil society.**
- **The forthcoming establishment of National Roundtables with the support of the European Commission should not only provide a platform for exchange, but also facilitate involvement of civil society. Part of the means available should be reserved to allow civil society organizations to prepare its input, including field investigations and consultations with stakeholders and communities.**
- **At EU level, too, there is need to strengthen the mechanisms for the involvement of Civil Society in policy making. Proposals to that effect have been presented by a broad coalition of European civil society organizations in November 2014. These proposals are annexed to this paper.**

2. Policy delivery remains weak.

The effectiveness of EU cohesion, social and regional policies for Roma inclusion is unfortunately still very weak. We can all observe this and much work over the past several years has been done to identify factors that inhibit successful policies to address the disadvantaged position of Roma. The lack of active involvement of target communities in project design and implementation remains one of the biggest obstacles to successful outcomes.

While the EU-level policy framework to a large extent sets the right coordinates for action, these rarely translate into concrete improvements down the line. Operational programmes often fail to include Roma issues explicitly – in opposition to the Common Basic Principles on Roma integration, which the Commission promotes – so that in practice much potential funding gets redirected to other groups of beneficiaries. Projects or programmes that do get approved often lack quality, do not involve beneficiaries in design or implementation, and are rarely thoroughly evaluated.

The possibly stigmatizing effects of such (non-exclusive) targeting should be tackled with local dialogue and inclusive planning practice, which in any case lead to much better outcomes. The costs for policy delivery of abandoning the 'explicit but not exclusive principle' far outweigh the shaky benefit of avoiding public resentment.

The National Roma Integration Strategies have so far not been able to address these issues and propose inadequate links with EU funding and national policy plans, also in the new programming period. Moreover, they strongly focus on the service delivery side of the problem, and do not really do justice to the need to address underlying inequality and discrimination and the necessity to support an independent civil society. As a result the Strategies have in most countries unfortunately gradually become detached from both reality on the ground and policy debates.

Recommendations:

- **The European Commission should strongly encourage managing authorities to ensure Operational Programs reflect the Common Basic Principle ‘explicit but not exclusive’. A specific indicator for Roma inclusion should be included in all relevant operational programmes in order to trigger applicants to include Roma communities as stakeholders and beneficiaries.**
- **As part of the annual reporting Member States should provide the connections between 2014-2020 Operational Programmes and the foreseen achievement of the objectives of the NRISs.**
- **The European Commission should support the development and deployment of community monitoring approaches and quality assessment of projects; territorial strategies and integrated approaches should always be accompanied by community participation trajectories. Further recommendations in this domain can be found in the annex.**

3. The pervasive and entrenched impact of anti-Gypsyism.

As indicated above, the effectiveness of policy implementation could be improved by promoting coordination between managing authorities, explicit targeting, better monitoring and increasing capacity at local level, and actively involving communities. While this would bring about better results, the root problem lies deeper. Roma exclusion is not just an issue of weak service delivery; it is a societal problem. If we want to bring about real change, stakeholders at all levels need to move to a deeper understanding of the reasons and mechanisms behind Roma exclusion. This can be achieved by a change of perspective; by looking at Roma exclusion through a different lense.

Discrimination of Roma has many manifestations. It ranges from the silent indifference of their fellow citizens to outspoken and violent extremism against individuals or communities. In between these extremes are less or more open forms of discrimination or unequal treatment. Sometimes the examples are anecdotal, but in other cases discrimination against Roma has a systemic and even institutionalized character. An example is the structural bias against Roma children in education, not only in Czech Republic – which now rightly faces an infringement procedure – but in other EU countries as well. Evictions that ignore the circumstances and needs of individuals and families are another example. Or the lack of political will or courage to address sometimes inhuman living conditions of Roma communities – even when funds are available. The weak performance of thematic programmes that aim to advance Roma inclusion is in many cases due to anti-Gypsyist tendencies among local public authorities or project promoters: their consistent inclination to consider Roma as mere policy clients, rather than equal stakeholders in programmes or projects, for example, leads to suboptimal outcomes if not outright failure.

We catch these forms of discrimination under the concept of anti-Gypsyism. While the manifestations are different, they stem from a common source: the idea that Roma are alien to our societies; Roma are not only different, they are also to varying degrees considered as undeserving of equal treatment as citizens. All these expressions of anti-Gypsyism have a profound effect on Roma citizens and communities. Sometimes subtle, sometimes rough, they continuously confirm the *status aparte* of Roma in society. In the meantime

Young Roma are the most severely affected by anti-Gypsyism. During their childhood and teenage years, when young people develop their moral consciousness and identity, they are confronted with all forms of anti-Gypsyism in their daily life: stereotypes, discrimination in schools, work and anywhere in the public space, and hate speech; but also structural discrimination such as school segregation and the lack of role models in media and society. Many young people feel forced to hide their identity.

EU policy on Roma has so far failed to really reflect the seriousness and impact of anti-Gypsyism. The European Commission has also been reluctant to accept it as both an analytical concept and an issue that needs to be confronted. This has hampered the development of adequate policy responses. We feel the issue should be addressed head-on in the coming years. Because it will not go away by itself as it continues to poison relations between Roma and non-Roma across Europe.

Recommendations:

- **By placing anti-Gypsyism firmly in the center of her agenda, the Commissioner can do much to promote much needed understanding and acceptance of the concept as well as to tackle it as an issue. Doing this would act to sustain confidence of civil society in the political commitment of the European Commission to address Roma exclusion; indicate a progression of understanding of Roma issues among policy makers; and point to a clear aspiration to develop more effective policy responses. Firm public statements on unacceptable practices, acts of violence or matters with high symbolic significance – such as the Porajmos or the recognition of the Lety concentration camp – are an integral part of pronouncing this agenda.**
- **Where discrimination against Roma is structural, the European Commission should use all legal means available to hold governments to account. The threat of an infringement procedure should be perceived in capitals as real, immediate, and tangible. The course of and communication around the infringement procedure against the Czech Republic is significant here. The message should be clear that members states can expect real consequences if they fail to tackle structural discrimination and will not be allowed a ten year plus delay before proceedings are brought against them.**
- **The European Commissioner should promote the best practice of the German government which has started to explicitly address anti-Gypsyism and is providing long term support for NGOs that promote dialogue and provide education about anti-Gypsyism. The EC should also ensure support for Roma youth organizations – which offer young Roma a safe space to affirm and negotiate their identity, to become role models and to step into the public debate for their work – is sustained.**
- **The European Commission should take action to strengthen the capacity of equality bodies to provide appropriate responses to discrimination against Roma. The EC should urge Equinet, the European network of equality bodies, to revise its Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018 in order to remedy the omission of discrimination against Roma as a priority. The EC should also increase its support for NGOs that offer legal support for victims of discrimination, unequal treatment and racism.**