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

**ERGO Network**

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## Introduction

Roma people are the most marginalised and one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Europe, with approximately 6 million living in the EU<sup>1</sup>. According to the EU MIDIS II report of 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, employment, health and housing.

The EU's 2014-2020 multi-annual financial 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.<sup>2</sup> International institutions and stakeholders argue that a mainstream approach across all policies areas should be taken to achieve lasting structural changes for better cohesion, social inclusion and improvement of the life of the Roma.

Roma got a special policy focus and attention since 2011 thanks to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. This Framework became an important motor for EU Member States to include Roma in their countries' policies. The Framework is linked to other policies and funds in order to ensure policy alignment, investment and delivery of progress. The question is 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 Post-2020 EU Roma Framework and the new European Union Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027. This policy paper provides specific recommendations on possible ways of mainstreaming Roma inclusion in the next MFF and post 2020 EU Roma Framework.

## Need for stronger policy mainstreaming of Roma inclusion in existing EU policies

The EU is currently recovering from an economic and social crisis that had important consequences on the economic growth and social inclusion of Member States. The current programming period 2014-2020 it is mostly focusing on the use of meaningful investment aimed at addressing unemployment, social challenges, poverty reduction and economic growth.

**The 2020 Agenda**, adopted in 2010 has ambitious targets: 75% people aged 20-60 should be employed; rates of early school leavers should be below 10%; at least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed higher education; at least 20 million fewer people should be in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. However the 2020 Agenda failed to reach its objectives, people are still at risk of poverty and exclusion; social inequalities are higher than before.

Moreover, there are no indicators of progress for the specific situation of Roma; although data shows that they are in the most precarious situation in Europe *80% of Roma surveyed live below their country's at-risk-of-poverty threshold*. According to the FRA report EU MIDIS II<sup>3</sup> and the International Labour Organization<sup>4</sup>, Roma still do not benefit from mainstream EU policies for employment. Due to their low levels of education they have difficulties to enter the labour market

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

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/eu-funding-roma-integration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/eu-funding-roma-integration_en)

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.

and continue to live on the edge of poverty while suffering from discrimination and exclusion that is entirely driven by antigypsyism.

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

One of the most important initiatives that aimed to reach the most deprived and those furthest from the labour market were the **European Youth Guarantee**, complemented in 2013 by a financial instrument, the Youth Employment Initiative scheme. The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years old receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.<sup>5</sup> However, the European Parliament's assessment on the Youth Initiative implementation 2017 revealed that the program itself did not reach vulnerable groups, and more specifically did not manage to improve the situation of Roma youth.

**The European Semester** is a framework which coordinates the economic policies across the EU, this allows the members states to discuss their economic and budget plans and promotes reforms of mainstream policies.

Since 2012 the European Commission proposes annual Country Specific Recommendations (CSR), under the Semester which is adopted by the Council. In previous years the CSRs in many countries focused on education and employment; issues that are very relevant for Roma people. The fact that the EC sees a need to submit the same CSRs every year clearly shows the lack of commitment and investment from national governments. CSRs relevant to Roma implementation are limited to projects under the **European Social Fund** (ESF) which have a short time span without sustainability or feasibility to implement the CSR.

There is a different approach in the *three countries that are under infringement procedures related to discrimination in education (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia)*. These countries try to tackle the implementation of CSRs through legislative reforms. However, the efforts are not yet visible. Even though the European Semester and CSRs and infringements procedure have so far demonstrated that they are 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 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 showing the limits of the CSR is the fact that Roma references are just sub-components of the main CSR on education. Consequently the EC generally assesses the implementation of the CSRs without looking specifically on the progress achieved on Roma measures. The **European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>6</sup> (ESPR)** is an EU initiative to monitor to what extent social rights at EU and national level are implemented. Each of the 20 principles of the Social Pillar is

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<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union (2013), Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013/C 120/01), 22 April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

relevant for Roma communities (e.g. unemployment benefits, employment conditions health care, child care, gender equality).

It is still unclear how the ESPR 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 ESPR and EU Semester. At national level, the Member States have to present a proposal on how to implement the Pillar in which specific focus should be given to the vulnerable such as the Roma. So far there is not a model or reference that is putting Roma as an indicator under the ESPR at national level.

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

With the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (the 'EU Roma Framework' the European Commission urges all 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). The 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 also to make use of the EU funds for Roma inclusion<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time, from the perspective of the European Semester the European Commission urges Member States to ensure that ESPR creates strong linkages **between policy and funding priorities**<sup>8</sup>. This was supposed to guarantee the implementation of the Country Specific Recommendations and mainstream policies by making policy reforms.

### **No significant impact on the situation of Roma on the ground**

A Court of Auditors' report<sup>9</sup> points out that there has been progress in setting EU policy initiatives aimed to support Roma inclusion. However, there are specific problems related to mainstreaming Roma inclusion in general policies. Moreover, EU funds<sup>10</sup> have been misused in some projects that actually perpetuated social exclusion of Roma. According to the Court, the main factor is that antigypsyism<sup>11</sup> - racism against people stigmatised as gypsies – is not tackled. In 2019, discrimination continues to be widespread across the EU and hate speech, hate crime and discrimination are on the rise.

ERGO Network is concerned that there may even be a regression on the accomplishments on Roma inclusion achieved by the European Commission and member states to date.

<sup>7</sup> Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies (SWD) 2017

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> EN 2016, no. 14 Court of Auditors [http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16\\_14/SR\\_ROMA\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_14/SR_ROMA_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> 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"

<sup>11</sup> <http://antigypsyism.eu/>

It is essential that the Commission maintains its commitment to Roma inclusion by making sure that the EU policy after 2020 is more inclusive and continue their work in including Roma under the umbrella of mainstream policies and relevant financial instruments. This paper outlines some specific recommendations on how the Roma inclusion can be streamlined in the next MFF and post 2020 EU Roma Framework.

### **Key recommendations for the post-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and mainstream policies**

- Extend the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies for the period 2020-2030, with a holistic approach in the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework 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 that should be taken by the European Commission**

- Address combating 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;
- Give more emphasis 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;
- Maintain investment priorities for non-discrimination and Roma inclusion as specific objectives in the Post-2020 European Social Funds' and European Regional Development Funds' regulations
- Hold an EU Roma Summit once during each Commission mandate aiming at renewing the political commitment of Member States, taking stock of progress and holding governments accountable on the delivery of results.

### **Initiatives/Actions that should be taken by Member States**

- Include Roma inclusion and combating 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 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 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 the equal participation of Roma;
- Youth should be a priority of EU and national policies on Roma. Youth is the segment of the 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; this initiative should be followed up after 2020. Opportunities under ERDF and EAFRD should be better promoted, in order to support the crucial integrated projects in education-employment-housing-health, desegregation measures in education and housing or geographic targeting of deprived neighbourhoods;
- Increase and review communication, coordination and dissemination strategy about the Youth Guarantee to reach relevant target groups.

### **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