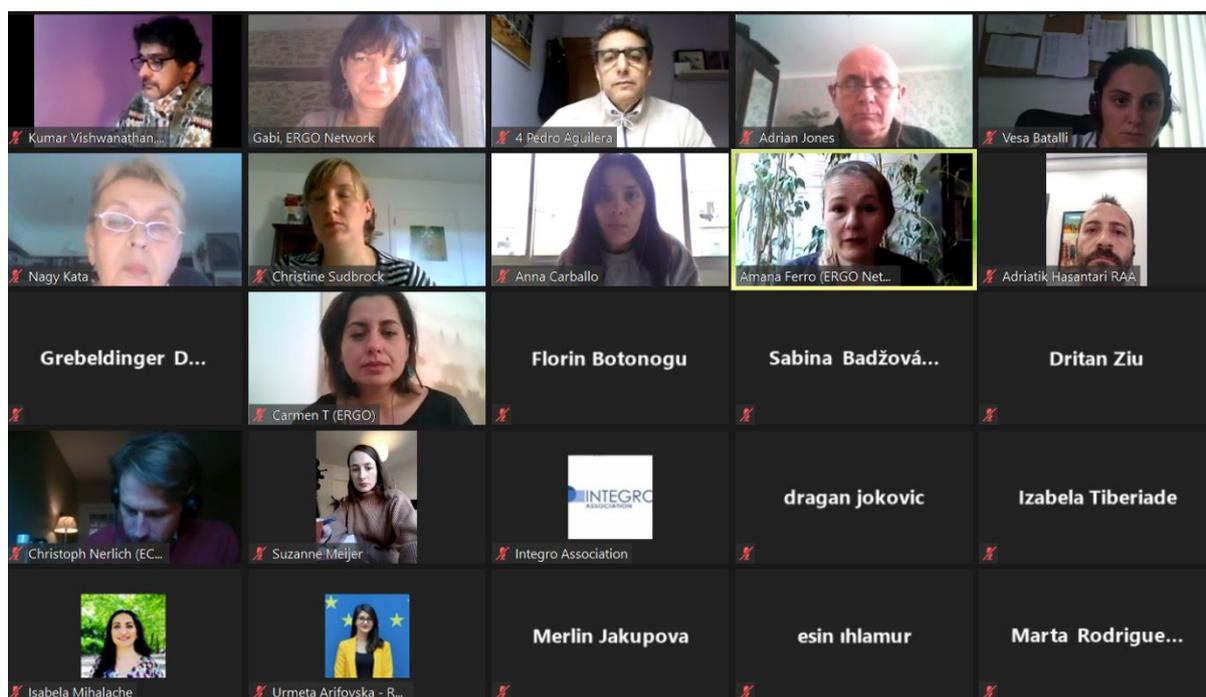


*Exchange of views between
ERGO Network members from selected countries
and members of the Cabinet of
European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights
Nicolas Schmit*



5 November 2020



Attending:

- European Commission: Christoph Nerlich, Anouk Faber (Cabinet of Commissioner Schmit), Marianne Doyen, Marta Rodrigues, Suzanne Meijer (DG EMPL).
- ERGO Network: Adriatik Hasantari, Dritan Ziu (Roma Active Albania, Albania), Dragan Joković (Otaharin, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Kadrin Hasanov (Integro Association, Bulgaria), Sabina Badžová (Slovo 21, Czech Republic), Kumar Vishwanathan (Vzájemné Soužití / Life Together, Czech Republic), Katalin Nagy (Pillangó Fejlesztések / Butterfly Development, Hungary), Vesa Batalli (Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, Kosovo), Urmeta Arifovska, Merlin Jakupova (Регионална Ромска Образовна Младинска Асоцијација / Regional Roma Educational Youth Association – RROMA, Macedonia), Florin Botonogu (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Romania), Daniel Grebeldinger (Nevo Parudimos, Romania), Pedro Aguilera, Annabel Carballo (Federació Assoc Gitanes de Catalunya / Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia - FAGiC, Spain), Esin Ihlamur (Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği / Zero Discrimination Association, Turkey), Adrian Jones (National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups, United Kingdom), Jamen Gabriela Hrašanová, Amana Ferro, Christine Sudbrock, Isabela Mihalache, Carmen Tănasie, Izabela Tiberiade (staff).

On 5 November 2020, the **European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network** facilitated an online exchange meeting between its national members and Ms **Anouk Faber** and Mr **Chrisoph Nerlich**, members of the Cabinet of European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit (DG EMPL).

The objectives of the meeting were:

- ✚ *How to create positive synergies between the new EU Roma Strategic Framework and the European Green Deal, Next Generation EU, and the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2021-2027?*
- ✚ *How to ensure that the upcoming Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights delivers on Roma inclusion, equality, and participation?*
- ✚ *How can ERGO Network support your work and feed Roma perspectives from the grassroots level, also in light of the adapted European Semester?*

Welcome and introduction

Jamen Gabriela Hrahaňová, Director, ERGO Network

Ms Hrahaňová welcomed participants and thanked Mr Nerlich and Ms Faber for taking the time to meet with ERGO Network's national membership. ERGO Network is a European umbrella organisation, active in nearly 30 European countries, and is also a member of the Social Platform. The organisation's mission – she explained – was to advance, protect, and promote access to rights and social inclusion for the 12 million Roma currently living in Europe. As tools to do that, she highlighted the fight against antigypsyism, advocacy for better policies for Roma in Europe, creating strong networks, and empowering Roma activists. While ERGO Network is supported by European Commission funding, in the framework of the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme, ERGO Network also works closely with DG JUST / EQUAL, notably on discrimination, equality, and the EU Roma Strategic Framework. Ms Hrahaňová further stressed that Europe's Roma experience some of the worst social inclusion indicators, with over 80% living in poverty, only 43% in paid employment, 41% experiencing antigypsyism, as well as poor access to health, education, and housing. She reminded that ERGO Network has been engaging closely with processes and policy initiatives such as the European Semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Social Economy Action Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Youth Guarantee, the Child Guarantee and others, carrying out specific work on the Covid-19 pandemic and associated socio-economic shocks, which have severely impacted Roma communities across Europe.

Overview of ERGO Network's work and priorities on social policy

Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Adviser, ERGO Network

Ms Ferro provided a brief overview of ERGO Network's engagement, at EU and national level, with the main dossiers currently dealt with by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion:

- ✚ *European Semester*: ERGO Network engages with its members in all stages of the Semester, monitoring their alignment with the EU Roma Strategic Framework. We took note of the changes to the Semester to incorporate the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Roma are not specifically mentioned as in the last ASGS – though we welcome the explicit reference to ethnic minorities. ERGO Network would have liked to see more CSRs on Roma issues in 2019 and regret their absence in 2020. Main concern:

the social dimension (poverty and equality) is de-prioritised in favour of the green and digital transitions (no Flagship on social issues, no social earmarking of funds in the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Our members are currently engaging with their Governments and European Semester Officers on the drafting of the National Resilience and Recovery Plans, to ensure that the Roma are included and that the Plans work in synergy with the National Roma Strategic Frameworks.

- ✚ *European Pillar of Social Rights*: Members are promoting its principles at the national level within their work, and ERGO Network is currently preparing a comprehensive contribution to the consultation on the upcoming Action Plan, detailing what the 20 policy principles mean for Roma rights and inclusion. The Action Plan should include ambitious objectives and disaggregated indicators in the Social Scoreboard, to capture the specific challenges of ethnic groups such as the Roma.
- ✚ *Sustainable Development Goals*: ERGO Network is closely following their implementation and anchoring its advocacy in their content; we produced a detailed report on how not to leave Roma communities behind in the delivery of the Goals.
- ✚ *Youth Guarantee*: Roma youth have very high rates of NEETs, compared to the majority population, so ERGO Network welcomes the newly released reinforced Guarantee. ERGO Network is also running an Employment Campaign to promote more diversity in workplaces and to support young Roma in their path to employment.
- ✚ *Child Guarantee*: While it is specifically designed to tackle the challenges faced by vulnerable children, Roma children are not named as a target group in the list of key groups that the initiative is aimed at. ERGO Network has submitted its input to the consultation on the Roadmap and will also provide feedback on the upcoming EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.
- ✚ *Covid-19 pandemic*: ERGO Network has undertaken a wide survey of 7 EU Member States and 6 Western Balkans countries plus Turkey, to map the impact of the pandemic and related economic crisis on Roma communities, who have been particularly hard hit (access to basic needs, housing, education, health care, employment, but also increasing levels of antigypsyism).
- ✚ *MFF 2021-2027*: Members are engaging at the national level to push for Roma inclusion as a specific investment priority, for a Roma specific indicator in the Performance Framework, and for the enabling conditions to include the fight against discrimination and segregation, as well as the Partnership Principle. ERGO Network held a series of direct meetings with desk officers of DG EMPL, as well as DG REGIO and DG AGRI, on EU funds more generally and on CLLD in particular, and we are currently preparing an evaluation of the last CLLD cycle in three key Member States.
- ✚ *Social Economy*: ERGO Network examined this year the key role of social economy in delivering Roma inclusion, in a pandemic and post-pandemic setting. We have produced a position paper to be launched at ERGO Network's annual policy conference in ten days' time (co-organised with Social Economy Europe and the European Parliament Intergroup on Social Economy). The paper will inform our advocacy next year around the upcoming Social Economy Action Plan.
- ✚ In 2021, we will focus on Roma access to essential social protection, such as *adequate minimum income schemes*, following also the German Presidency Council Conclusions.

A full list of relevant ERGO Network publications, complete with hyperlinks, is available at the end of this report.

Questions from ERGO Network national members

Katalin Nagy, Pillangó Fejlesztések / Butterfly Development, Hungary

Ms Nagy represents Butterfly Development, an organisation mainly working in rural Hungary with the aim of creating employment and wellbeing opportunities for Roma and non-Roma people in need. The organisation's flagship activity is the *Pro Ratatouille* project, a community-based, small scale agricultural initiative, using chemical-free, natural practices with the methodology of experience-based ongoing learning during the whole project period, in combination with community development activities. The project focuses on growing vegetables, which provide direct livelihood for participants, as well as represent a potential source of income. Butterfly Development has a keen interest in social economy initiatives and their potential for Roma, which is why it is looking forward to the adoption of the announced EU Action Plan for Social Economy. In its context, Ms Nagy wanted to hear more about the Commission's thinking around the role that social economy can play in the improvement of employment and wellbeing chances for people in need, especially Roma, with special regard to mitigating the consequences of Covid-19 related crises.

Pedro Aguilera, Federació Assoc Gitanes de Catalunya / Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia - FAGiC, Spain

Mr Aguilera represents The Federació de Associacions Gitanes de Catalunya – FAGiC (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia), which was created in 1991. It brings together 96 Roma associations from all over Catalonia, making FAGiC the most representative Roma organisation in the region. Its purpose is to defend and promote the rights and culture of the Roma people in Catalonia. His question was about the Youth Guarantee: How we can better support transitions between education and labour market for Roma? What kind of initiatives are foreseen in this field, especially in the green and digital economy? The Youth Guarantee has been a tool to improve access to the labour market, or second chance to come back to studies. Roma civil society organizations are key partners in delivering this for Roma youth, who are experiencing very high rates of NEETs, with a difference of almost 52% to the rates of the majority population. It seems that initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee have been effective for an important group of young people, but not for Roma. How we can overcome this situation, also under the new EU Roma Strategic Framework?

Adriatik Hasantari, Roma Active Albania, Albania

Mr Hasantari is Vice-Chair of ERGO Network and represents Roma Active Albania, established in 2006 to contribute in the empowerment and mobilisation of Roma in Albania and in Europe, through the creation of a Roma grassroots movement that can change the position of Roma and fight against exclusionary mechanisms. Half of Europe's Roma live outside the European Union, yet they face the same challenges as those living in the EU. Education and employment are key elements, but the Roma in the Western Balkans are not reached by measures currently in place. Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries have already committed to joining the EU Roma Framework. How can we increase the participation of these countries in the EU's overarching, mainstream social and economic policy frameworks, such as those discussed today? How can we improve the learning from Member States towards Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries, particularly the Western Balkans?

Responses and intervention from Commissioner Nicolas Schmit Cabinet members

Christoph Nerlich, Budget / Finance Adviser, Cabinet of Nicolas Schmit

Mr Nerlich thanked ERGO Network for the invitation and appreciated that many good points were raised in the previous interventions, in alignment with the priorities of the Cabinet. He remarked that the meeting was a very good opportunity to exchange and to explain what the Commission was currently working on and what initiatives were in the pipeline. He reaffirmed Commissioner Nicolas Schmit's commitment to Roma rights and inclusion, and particularly the need to ensure good implementation of EU funds on the ground. The Partnership Principle was key, in his opinion, and any work that Roma civil society could do at national level to push for the Partnership Principle was appreciated. He added that, while it was great to have the legal provision, implementation in Member States was not yet at the desired level. He confirmed that the 2019 and 2020 Country-Specific Recommendations remained valid, and that they were a key assessment element for the evaluation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. The Commission will monitor the implementation of the 2019 CSRs on Roma in this framework. While a lot of attention was indeed dedicated to green and digital (the so-called "mega trends"), he stressed that social and particularly employment objectives were also very important, not least regarding job creation. The latter (number of jobs to be created) is another key criteria for assessing the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Fundamental rights are mainstreamed across the entire European Semester. Mr Nerlich further highlighted InvestEU, a useful resource for investing in skills development also for Roma, and ReactEU, a reserve fund of 47.5 billion euro, meant to top up ERDF, ESF+ and FEAD, which could also be used for Roma inclusion. Regarding the Youth Guarantee, he stressed that the role of civil society organisations was strengthened in the recently released reinforcement of the initiative, which also brings a renewed focus on personalised approaches and tailored responses, rooted in the specific needs of every beneficiary.

Anouk Faber, Political Adviser, Cabinet of Nicolas Schmit

Ms Faber added that social economy was a very important topic for the Cabinet and appreciated the work that ERGO Network has been engaging with around this topic. She explained that the Action Plan was very much work in progress and there was an ongoing process of consultation, to which ERGO Network's contribution would be very appreciated. Regarding the Child Guarantee, she highlighted that one of the ongoing pilot projects was specifically dedicated to Roma children, which was a good entry point for ERGO's work. She took note of concerns that Roma children are, for the moment, not specifically mentioned in the Roadmap proposal, but emphasised that the Child Guarantee proposal was not out yet, so there was still time and scope to influence its content.

End of the meeting

ERGO Network Director Ms **Jamen Gabriela Hraňaňová** thanked Ms Faber and Mr Nerlich for the precious insights and for having taken the time for this exchange. She underlined that ERGO Network will continue the work and is at their disposal should they need Roma-specific input on any initiative, or any other support. She expressed the wish to also have the opportunity to exchange with Commissioner Schmit himself in future.

Relevant ERGO Network positions and publications

European Semester

- ERGO Network response to the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy package 2021 ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network response to the Country-Specific Recommendations 2020 ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network response to the Country Reports 2020 ([here](#)).

European Pillar of Social Rights

- ERGO Network input paper to the consultation of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights (*upcoming*).

Sustainable Development Goals

- ERGO Network report *Roma Included in the Sustainable Development Goals* ([here](#)).

Youth Guarantee / Youth Employment Initiative

- ERGO Network contribution to *Quality Standards for the Youth Guarantee* ([here](#))
- ERGO Network research on European Youth Guarantee and Roma ([here](#))
- ERGO Network paper *Investing in our future: What work(s) for Roma youth* ([here](#))
- ERGO Network Youth Employment Campaign *A Place for All* ([here](#) and [here](#))

Child Guarantee

- ERGO Network input to the consultation on a Roadmap for a Child Guarantee ([here](#)).

Covid-19 pandemic

- ERGO Network paper *EU Recovery Plan: The case of Roma in Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries* ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network paper *The effects of Covid-19 on Roma communities in EU Member States and Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries* ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network presentation *Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Roma and how to be prepared for the next crisis* ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network report *Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Roma and Traveller communities in the EU and Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries* (*upcoming*).

Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027

- ERGO Network Toolkit for national members *How to engage more effectively with ESF+ and ERDF* ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network Synthesis Report 2019 *Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) for Roma Inclusion* ([here](#)).
- ERGO Network Synthesis Report 2020 *Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) Quality Audit: Evaluation of the current cycle 2021-2027* (*upcoming*).

Social Economy

- ERGO Network paper *The role of Social Economy in supporting Roma social and economic inclusion. A close-up on the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery strategies* ([here](#)).