



## European Commission releases Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS) 2022 – What’s in it for Europe’s Roma?

On 24 November 2021, the European Commission published the [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2022](#), accompanied by the draft [Joint Employment Report 2022](#) (among other annexes), thus launching the European Semester 2022.

The document is no longer called “Strategy”, having reverted to the previous name of “Survey”, used up to (and including) 2018. It is unclear what might have brought about the change of name, as the text is similar in content and format to its predecessors. It reaffirms that “The European Semester will remain the overall EU framework for the coordination of economic, employment and social policies”, while the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** remains “the key tool to implement the policy agenda” and is fully embedded in the European Semester. It also confirms the commitment to the four complementary dimensions of **environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability**. These four dimensions should work together and be mutually reinforcing. Encouragingly, there are quite a few references to the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with renewed commitments to their implementation.

For the second consecutive year, there is **no mention of Europe’s Roma in this year’s Annual Sustainable Growth Survey**. Furthermore, unlike in previous years, there is equally **no reference to ethnic or racial minority background**. This is a shocking oversight, in a context that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented health and social crisis, which disproportionately hit those in an already disadvantaged situation, such as Europe’s Roma. The differentiated impact of the pandemic is mentioned, but fails to include Roma or ethnic minorities, only referring to young people, the low-skilled, people with a migrant background, and women.

Similarly, the text contains **no mention of antigypsyism or even discrimination anywhere** in its content. The document is not rooted in an intersectional perspective, while **other key groups facing inequality are equally not referred to** - notably nothing is said about older people or the LGBTQIA+ community. There is a single reference to people with a migrant background and people with disabilities, while ageing is only mentioned twice, but only in the context of labour market needs and sustainability of public finances. Gender equality is only mentioned once, while women are referred to 5 times – out of which 4 are again in only related to labour shortages. Children are absent from the document, save for a tokenistic mention of childcare, and young people only appear 4 times, with a narrow focus on skills and jobs. This is a very worrying stance.

The document’s **main focus is on the green and digital transitions**, which has been a staple of this Commission’s political agenda. While social concerns are integrated as a component of these transitions and also have a dedicated section under the fairness objective, the prioritizing doesn’t seem to be at least on equal footing. **Poverty is only briefly mentioned**, mainly when the targets of the Social Pillar Action Plan are enumerated, however not as a key priority. The text states that “Social protection helped keep the share of people in poverty stable”, which is **very unambitious**, what is needed is a clear commitment to reduce it further, at least to the levels mandated by the Social Pillar Action Plan. While wording on social resilience and social cohesion is slightly more present in the text compared to previous years, which is positive, it **feels more like a rhetorical exercise, rather than actual mainstreaming** of social concerns throughout the policy agenda.

The section dedicated to fairness clearly states that “**fairness needs to be at the heart of the recovery**”, which is a very welcome stance, but only some elements are being looked at in more detail in the rest of the section. **Education and training** are extensively mentioned, however **understood very narrowly from a predominant labour market perspective**, with a focus on green and digital transition needs. We appreciate the focus on combatting inequalities in education, including the digital divide (although it is not named as such), as well as the impetus to promote inclusion, diversity, and gender equality. Some of the language about tax benefit reforms and active labour market policies is ambiguous and **raises concerns about introducing more conditionality and sanctions, as opposed to personalized, comprehensive support**, rooted in an Active Inclusion approach. Quality of work and employment also seem to be missing dimensions.

Additionally, there is **very little concerning those who cannot work**, while a lot of emphasis is placed on the labour market and raising employment rates. There are a few references to “strong social protection systems” – though *adequate* would have been a more suitable qualifier. The document states that, across the board, 30% (135 billion euro) of the NRRPs’ allocations concern strengthening social cohesion, however **examples given are mostly employment-related**. There is a single sentence on “investing in healthcare and better access to services, including early childhood education and care, long-term care and social housing”. Aside it, **nothing else is said about ensuring access to fundamental services and rights, such as health or housing**. Rising housing prices are mentioned elsewhere in the document, but looking only at the economic liability of a potential real estate bubble, rather than at access, quality, or affordability.

A positive element is the commitment to **put the social dimension at the heart of the green agenda** and to **stem energy poverty**, for example through putting forward a Social Climate Fund to support low- and middle-income households, through tackling rising energy prices, and through an announced upcoming Council Recommendation on addressing the employment and social aspects of the climate transition. However, while circular economy is mentioned once, there is **no reference to social economy** in the text. This is very disappointing, considering the very recent launch of the EU Social Economy Action Plan in December 2021.

In what concerns the draft **Joint Employment Report**, we are very pleased to see Europe's **Roma mentioned multiple times in the document**, concerning issues such as their heightened risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion (including that of children), gaps in accessing education and training, school segregation, and the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (including on employment and income levels). These references are very positive and elaborate, and very welcome. However, it is clear that the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey does not build on the findings of the Joint Employment Report, as it completely ignores these concerns.

Additionally, **strong links are made to the EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation**, highlighting synergies with the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as to the adoption of National Roma Frameworks. Very disappointingly though, while the document is quite extensive in covering Roma poverty and education, **other thematic objective of the EU Roma Framework – employment, housing, health – are not covered at all** in the Report. Equally, **there is no mention of antigypsyism or racism**, and only four references to discrimination in the 160 pages, none of them referring specifically to the plight of the Roma.

Regarding civil dialogue, **the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey only mentions civil society once**, concerning the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, while the vague phrasing “other / relevant stakeholders” is also included a few times. In contrast, the systematic involvement of social partners is much more consistently stressed, including through a dedicated paragraph. In the draft **Joint Employment Report**, **civil society involvement is much better covered**, with multiple references to its instrumental role as an important asset in implementing social and employment policies, in accordance with the Employment Guidelines.

The ASGS also provides some **clarity about the future of the European Semester**, as well as what are the key steps and milestones to be expected for 2022. Unsurprisingly, this year's Semester will include the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, “in a complementary fashion and avoiding overlaps”, in order to prevent an administrative burden on Member States.

Concretely, **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)** will be submitted in April, in the same time as the first of the bi-annual reports on the **National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)**, while the second bi-annual report will follow in October. However, **Country Reports** will no longer be released in Winter, but in Spring (May), and will have a streamlined format, taking stock also of the implementation of the NRRPs and the corresponding assessment Scoreboard. The Country Reports will, thus, accompany the **Country-Specific Recommendations**, to be released at the same time (May). This is an unfortunate disconnect, as the Country Reports will no longer inform the drafting of National Reform Programmes, thus removing a valuable opportunity for stakeholders, including civil society, to feed their concerns.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** and its headline targets will equally be implemented in the framework of the European Semester, and progress towards objectives will be monitored function of its Social Scoreboard and included in the Country Reports. Additionally, for the first time, the **Sustainable Development Goals** have been brought into the European Semester fold. A yearly monitoring report prepared by Eurostat will form the basis of the assessment, which will also be included as a separate chapter in each Country Report. Sadly, performance on the SDGs, much like that of the Social Pillar, will also be tracked in comparison to EU averages, which might encourage a race to the bottom, rather than aspiring to ambitious results. **The various Scoreboards** (of the NRRPs, of the Social Pillar) and monitoring reports (for example on the SDGs) **will form the basis of the Country-Specific Recommendations.**

This year's Annual Sustainable Growth Survey is driven by an overriding impetus to build a green and digital Europe. Sadly, while some references to disadvantaged groups are present, the Roma are not specifically taken into account, and the social and equality dimensions are broadly overlooked. ERGO Network will continue to push for **bringing Roma rights and inclusion much more in focus in the delivery of these initiatives**, and for better alignment of the priorities of the European Semester and those of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion.