



## EUROPEAN SEMESTER 2023

### Annual Sustainable Growth Survey

Outlining the economic and employment policy priorities for the EU for the coming 12 to 18 months.



#### European Commission releases Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS) 2023 – What’s in it for Europe’s Roma<sup>1</sup>?

On 22 November 2022, the European Commission published the [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023](#), accompanied by the draft [Joint Employment Report 2023](#) (among other annexes), thus launching the next European Semester for this year.

The **Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS)** highlights the main policy priorities for the European Union for the year to come, and it outlines the main tools for implementing these objectives. It states that “The **European Semester** and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** continue to provide a robust framework for effective policy coordination in view of the current challenges. 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 (**Social Pillar**) **Action Plan** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with renewed commitments to their implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella term “Roma” encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the [European Commission](#).

ERGO Network warmly welcomes the **explicit mention of the Roma in this year's Annual Sustainable Growth Survey** (page 11), in the context of **supporting their access to employment**, as part of an enumeration of categories whose employment rates lag behind, including also young people, women, person with disabilities, and people with a migrant background. Additionally, the document states that “The implementation of the Union of Equality strategies is also crucial to achieve stronger social and economic resilience” (page 2), where these strategies include the **EU Anti-Racism Action Plan** and the **EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation** among others, listed in a footnote. While these references are minimal, they are nonetheless commendable in a context where, for two years in a row, the ASGS made no explicit reference to the Roma or to these important strategies.

However, it is regrettable that the Roma are only considered from the perspective of their contribution to the labour market, while other aspects of their wellbeing and social inclusion are missing from the document. There is **no comprehensive approach across the four pillars of the EU Roma Strategy**. The ASGS only includes one additional reference to **children with a minority ethnic background** and to the impact of socio-economic background and of the pandemic on educational outcomes. This is positive, however nothing else is said about racialised communities in the rest of the text, and **discrimination, racism, or antigypsyism are not mentioned at all**.

The ASGS's **main focus is on the green and digital transitions**, a staple of this Commission's political agenda, an unfortunate trend since the von der Leyen Commission took office. There is a **lack of prioritisation of the fight against poverty** throughout the text, as it is mainly mentioned when the targets of the Social Pillar Action Plan are enumerated, or in connection to energy poverty. This is welcome but not enough, and **it is not acceptable that the risk of poverty and social exclusion remained stable**. What is needed is a clear commitment to reduce it further, at least to the levels mandated by the Social Pillar Action Plan. Additionally, while circular economy is mentioned several times, 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.

The graph in page 3 focuses on reduced household disposable incomes due to inflation and energy prices as a factor impacting consumption, European companies, and the labour market, **rather than through a poverty and wellbeing lens**. The same graph identifies only employment and skills (not education more broadly) as medium-term challenges for the fairness objective, from the narrow angle of supporting the green and digital transitions. This is **a missed opportunity to have highlighted an Active Inclusion approach**, combining supportive pathways towards quality jobs, universal access to quality services and adequate income support schemes.

The section on Fairness (pages 9-12) is more comprehensive than in previous years, however the bulk of it is dedicated to employment measures. We very much welcome calls to **strengthen collective bargaining and to raise wage levels**, to improve the **quality and accessibility of healthcare and long-term care systems**, and to **preserve and improve the adequacy of social safety nets**, including pensions. It is a pity, however, that **access to adequate and affordable housing is not mentioned**, and that education continues to be understood in a **limited sense of providing skills for jobs**, rather than a broader focus on its role for personal development, active citizenship and participation, and sustainable democracies. We further appreciate that the section on Environmental Sustainability includes language about delivering **affordable energy** and **mitigating the economic and social impact of high energy prices** on vulnerable households.

In what concerns the draft **Joint Employment Report (JER)**, 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), the impact of low socio-economic background and the digital divide on educational outcomes, **early school leaving, school segregation**, discrimination in **accessing healthcare**, and **labour market** integration. Additionally, **strong links are made to the EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation**, as part of the Union of Equality. Very disappointingly though, **there is no mention of antigypsyism or racism**, and only four references to discrimination in the 160 pages, one of them referring specifically to the plight of the Roma.

The Annual Sustainable Growth Survey reaffirms **the European Commission’s commitment to “an inclusive process and the timely involvement** of social partners and other relevant stakeholders during the European Semester cycle”, calling on Member States to “engage actively [...] **in particular representatives of civil society organisations**, through regular exchanges” (page 17 – our bold). This is very positive, as are the **several references to civil society in the draft Joint Employment Report**, where their involvement is deemed instrumental to the delivery of quality reforms and policies, including through the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The ASGS also provides **clarity about the future of the European Semester** and what are the key steps and milestones to be expected for 2023. This year’s Semester will continue to monitor the **implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)**, as well as identify other economic, employment and social policy challenges not addressed by the Plans, which will be detailed in the **Country Reports**. These will be released, together with the **Country-Specific Recommendations** (focusing on key challenges from the Country Reports), in the framework of the European Semester Spring Package (expected in May). The **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** and its 2030 headline targets will equally be monitored in the framework of the European Semester, as progress towards objectives will be tracked function of its Social Scoreboard and included in the Country Reports. Additionally, the Country Reports will assess the **progress and challenges for each Member State on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, while in 2023 the Commission will also put forward the first EU-level voluntary review of SDG implementation.

ERGO Network will continue to advocate for **a stronger focus on Roma rights and inclusion in the framework for these processes**, and for closer synergies between the European Semester and the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation.

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