



European Commission releases Spring Package – What’s in it for Europe’s Roma*?

On 19 June 2024, the European Commission published the so-called *Spring Package* in the framework of the **2024 European Semester**, comprising (among others) 27 [Country Reports](#), 27 [Country-Specific Recommendations](#), and a [Communication on the Spring Package](#). ERGO Network and its national members reviewed the Package, to see to which extent it explicitly mentions Roma rights and inclusion, ethnic minorities, discrimination, and racism, as well as to assess whether national civil society was involved in the drafting of the Country Reports.

Key Findings

1. **The Communication on the Spring Package mentions the Roma twice**, regarding their labour market participation and impact of inflation – but nothing on health, housing, education.
2. **8 Country Reports include references to the Roma (BG, CZ, GR, HU, IE, RO, SK, SI)** in 2024, one more than in 2023, but still insufficient as Roma live in 26 EU Member States.
3. **There is 1 Country-Specific Recommendation (SK) on Roma**, who are also mentioned in **6 Preambles (BG, CZ, GR, HU, RO, SK)**, a significant step up from 2023 (only one Preamble, HU).
4. **Ethnic minorities feature in 4 Country Reports (BG, DE, EE, FI) and no CSRs**, while **discrimination is mentioned in 7 CRs (AT, HU, IE, NL, SK, ES, SE) and two Preambles (AT, NL)**.
5. **Civil society was poorly associated to the drafting of the Country Reports**, but it is mentioned in **8 of them (CZ, DK, GR, HU, IE, LV, SK, SI)**, and in **all Preambles except CY & ES**.

Overall remarks

The **European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network** welcomes the explicit mentions of the **European Roma** in the *Communication on the Spring Package*. The text stresses that “*Ample scope remains to improve the labour market participation of underrepresented groups, including women, older and younger people, as well as disadvantaged groups such as Roma, people with a migrant background and persons with disabilities*” (page 19, our underlining).

Additionally, the text states that “*Although inflation is falling fast, higher costs of food, energy and transport are negatively affecting particularly lower income groups and people in disadvantaged situations*”, and a footnote clarifies the latter to mean “*e.g. single parents, persons with disabilities, and people with a migrant background or ethnic national minorities (such as Roma)*.” (page 14, our underlining). Last but not least, another footnote explains the Union of Equality, listing its strategies aimed at “*those with a minority racial or ethnic background, including Roma*.” (page 14, our underlining).

While the first quote is nearly identical to last year’s Communication, **we appreciate the additional reference** this year to the rising cost of living and the devastating impact of inflation, including hunger and energy poverty. While we rejoice to see Europe’s largest minority explicitly referenced, it is unfortunate that the approach continues to be **anchored primarily in the perspective of reducing labour market shortages** and employment gaps, rather than stemming from a comprehensive, rights-based, wellbeing approach. **Other crucial elements**, such as education, health, housing, access to rights, equality, and participation, **are regrettably missing**.

The Union of Equality is equally narrowly reduced to “equal opportunities in the labour market and in education”, and the **EU Roma Strategic Framework is not even mentioned** by name, much less comprehensively mainstreamed. There are **no additional references to ethnic minorities or racism**, while the **sole mention of discrimination** is in the context of acknowledging the **slow progress registered** in this area, as well as on equal opportunities, in the implementation of the 2019-2022 Country-Specific Recommendations.

The structure of the Communication follows, as usual, **the EU's four guiding dimensions** of macroeconomic stability, productivity, environmental sustainability, and fairness. Very explicitly, "The 2024 European Semester cycle is **particularly focused on competitiveness**" (our bold), which is the same priority as in 2023, and the mantra that repeats consistently throughout the text. Tackling bottlenecks to competitiveness is also highlighted as the underpinning concern of the CSRs. This year's Semester also prepares the ground for successfully **implementing the new economic governance framework**, while also providing guidance in view of the forthcoming **mid-term review of cohesion policy programmes**.

The implementation of the **Recovery and Resilience Plans** (including the recently adopted RepowerEU chapter), the **Sustainable Development Goals**, and the **European Pillar of Social Rights** continue to be tracked through the Spring Package. As every year, the Communication includes a **wide range of Annexes**, covering an overview of the thematic areas in the CSRs, monitoring of the previous CSRs' implementation, monitoring of the delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals, and key findings of the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure. However, the **Social Pillar is barely mentioned** outside the Fairness section and, while the Communication includes an Appendix tracking the EU's progress on the SDGs, there is nothing similar for monitoring the Social Pillar.

The **Fairness** chapter makes some very important points about **increasing rates of child and energy poverty** and the need to **keep investing in fighting poverty**, not least because of only modest advances in meeting the Social Pillar Action Plan poverty-reduction target. The chapter also highlights rising cost of living and the key role of **adequate minimum wages**, adequate working conditions, **social protection, essential services**, and – for the first time! – the **need for affordable housing**. Investment in **healthcare and long-term care**, including in their workforce and in narrowing health inequalities, in another welcome aspect. We also salute the **piloting of the Social Convergence Framework**, a new monitoring tool for social objectives, now fully integrated into the European Semester. These commitments can play a key role in ensuring better access to rights and inclusion also for Europe's Roma.

ERGO Network response to the Spring Package 2024

Disappointingly, although the **only reference to the Roma** is in this very chapter, it is narrowly confined to boosting their **labour market participation**. The chapter includes a lengthy section on education and training, but its **main focus continues to be on skills and training for the labour market**, rather than on primary and secondary education, or the role of education in shaping personal development, thriving communities, and resilient democracies. The prevailing tone places an **explicit emphasis on competitiveness and productivity**, as well as on labour market needs and employment gaps, rather than on inclusion and wellbeing.

Overall, **social inclusion is not sufficiently mainstreamed** through the other three dimensions. While **poverty is mentioned 9 times** in the document, nearly all references are in the Fairness chapter, most of them in the same paragraph. There is **a single reference to social economy**, in the context of improving access to finance – which is positive, but insufficient. In a stark contrast with the previous year’s communication, there is **no mention anymore of welcoming and integrating refugees** from Ukraine, despite the extension of the Temporary Protection Directive.

On a more positive note, there is some **encouraging language around tax justice and distributional impact assessments**, including untapped taxation sources, moving away from taxing labour to pollution and property, and investing in the **adequacy, quality, and accessibility of pensions, healthcare, and long-term care**, although the resilience and cost-effectiveness of systems seems to be the leading focus.

The Communication pays even **less attention to stakeholder engagement than in previous years**, which is a regrettable step back, at a time where we would have expected the commitment to civil dialogue to be reaffirmed and further strengthened. Just as last year, **the role of civil society is significantly understated**, and it is only explicitly mentioned once, in the very last sentence of the document. There are only **three references to social partners** – more than civil society, but a watering down from last year’s five. National stakeholders are also mentioned in connection with the implementation of the new Economic Governance Framework, which is very welcome, however the same **involvement is no longer stressed for other processes**, such as the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, or the Social Pillar Action Plan.

We further **salute the inclusion of Roma concerns in the Employment Guidelines** for 2024, a yearly document highlighting common priorities and targets for employment and social policies, providing the basis for the Country-Specific Recommendations. This year, the Guidelines have been expanded and enriched in order **to reflect the most recent socio-economic context and policy initiatives**. The Explanatory Memorandum includes 5 references to the Roma, more than we had seen before, including synergies with the EU Roma Strategic Framework, though once again only reduced to its employment objectives. The text also includes a **strong call to tackle discrimination and poverty** (including, explicitly, that **of Roma**).

For the first time, **the Roma are also explicitly included in the Guidelines themselves**, which we warmly welcome. Guideline 6, *Enhancing labour supply and improving access to employment, lifelong acquisition of skills and competences*, speaks of activating and enabling those who can participate in the labour market, “including [...] **people from marginalised Roma communities**” (our bold). Equally, **Guideline 7**, *Enhancing the functioning of labour markets and the effectiveness of social dialogue*, contains a reference supporting those furthest from the labour market to access employment, “including people with a migrant background and **marginalised Roma people**” (our bold).

Once again, dismayingly, **both references are to Roma employment**, while overlooking all other aspects of the EU Roma Strategic Framework – health, housing, education, as well as antigypsyism, poverty, and participation. This gives the impression that the **Roma only count for Europe’s decision-makers as a desirable workforce**, rather than recipients of a rights-based approach that would aim at their inclusion, good living, and wellbeing.

Roma in the Country Reports 2024

The European Commission has prepared **Country Reports** for all 27 Member States, providing an **overview of challenges for each country**, with a **keen focus on competitiveness**. Sadly, this new focus prioritises profit margins over social inclusion, human rights, and equal opportunities. The Country Reports **analyse economic and social developments** in Member States, as well as **track progress** made in implementing **past Country-Specific Recommendations**, the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and its Action Plan, and the **Sustainable Development Goals**. They also take stock of the **delivery on the National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, as well as **Cohesion Policy programmes**, highlighting complementarity and feeding into the mid-term review of the latter.

Only **8 Country Reports include references to the Roma (BG, CZ, GR, HU, IE, RO, SK, SI)** in 2024, one more than in the previous year given the re-addition of Slovenia, who also received a Country Report mentioning the Roma in 2022. For the 7 countries whose Country Reports specifically included the Roma in both 2023 and 2024 (BG, CZ, GR, IE, HU, RO, SK), we are disappointed to see that **the number of these references has decreased** from 2023 in the Reports for Bulgaria, Greece, and Slovakia, has remained stable in the Czech Republic and Romania, and has only slightly increased in Hungary and Ireland. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Roma live in 26 EU Member States, some of them comprising significant Roma communities, there were **no other references in the remaining Country Reports**.

Encouragingly, **4 Country Reports (BG, EE, FI, DE) include references to the plight of ethnic minorities**, while there were none in 2023. In Bulgaria and Finland, the Reports highlight difficulties in accessing education, including online education in the latter. In Estonia and Germany, the documents stress the role played by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) in supporting minorities in the two countries. While these references are very welcome, they are very minimal, as there is **only one sentence in each Country Report mentioned above**, which is insufficient for a real commitment to supporting equal opportunities for racialised communities. Equally, we would have liked to see these references **in more if not all Country Reports**.

ERGO Network response to the Spring Package 2024

While, just like in 2023 and 2022, there are **no mentions of antigypsyism or racism** in any of the Country Reports, there are **references to discrimination in 7 of them** (AT, HU, IE, NL, SK, ES, SE), which is a marked increase from the previous years. We particularly welcome wording about the discrimination faced by the **Roma in Slovakia** (particularly those from marginalised communities) and **Travellers in Ireland** (chiefly regarding the private rental market), while the latter's Country Report also includes references to discriminatory attitudes towards **people with disabilities** in the workplace. Regarding the other countries, mentions of discrimination in their Country Reports are about **older workers** (Austria, twice), **access to justice** (Hungary), labour market (Netherlands), and **the role of ESF+** in combatting it (Spain, Sweden). The increase in references is very positive, however it is regrettable that **discrimination is not a cross-cutting dimension across all Country Reports**, on a multitude of intersectional grounds, as it constitutes one of the key root causes of poverty, exclusion, marginalisation, and poor social and societal outcomes.

ERGO Network members are **generally pleased with the quality and accuracy of the references** in the Country Reports which include Roma-specific content (BG, CZ, GR, HU, IE, RO, SK, SI). However, it is felt by several of our members that other equally **important aspects of Roma inclusion and wellbeing are missing**, thus undermining a cohesive, comprehensive approach that would yield results. Our members feel that, while Country Reports may be effective at capturing the difficult socio-economic situation of the Roma, **the roots of these challenges are ignored**, and they remain unaddressed in the **absence of solid policy proposals** in the Country Reports themselves, or without this analysis leading to Country-Specific Recommendations on Roma.

In **Bulgaria**, while the document mentions the high risk of poverty and social exclusion for Roma, there is **no specific reference to their poor housing conditions**, or to spatial segregation and the lack of policies for the regularisation of informal Roma settlements, or to the absence of a legal framework for social housing. The Report also overlooks that, since 2012, a significant challenge for tens of thousands of Roma has been the **lack of identification documents** due to housing deprivation and lack of a regular address. Furthermore, the Report **lacks any mention of antigypsyism**, even though it is the key cause of the social exclusion of Roma from education, employment, healthcare, social support and services, and housing.

In the **Czech Republic**, it is felt that the Roma mentions in the Country Report are **accurate and comprehensive**, spanning a broad range of issues, and particularly emphasising inclusive education. However, what appears to be **missing are references to discrimination and antigypsyism**, which are strong deterrents to the effective implementation of any strategy. Additionally, no mention is made of **the plight of Roma refugees from Ukraine**, who face compounded challenges and discrimination. Moreover, while the description of the challenges is clear, there are **no specifics about the policies** that are meant to tackle them.

In **Greece**, it is considered particularly disturbing by our members that the Country Report (and the Country-Specific Recommendations) for Greece **do not mention antigypsyism**, which is also the case for the Greek Roma Strategic Framework. This is **a tremendous missed opportunity**, because recognising the phenomenon is an important first step in combating it.

In **Hungary**, our members think that, overall, **the findings on Roma in the Country Report are relevant** and the recommendations are necessary. However, though the document identifies important problems, **the analysis is not comprehensive**, and issues such as the over-representation of Roma workers in public employment programmes, or **discrimination in the labour market**, are not mentioned.

In **Ireland**, our members' position is that the Country Report refers to the situation of Travellers and Roma and the shortcomings in the implementation of the 2017-2021 Traveller and Roma Inclusion strategy, but there is **no reference to the need for special measures** in education, health, accommodation or climate justice for disadvantaged groups. While **discrimination is mentioned**, there are **no clear links to EU frameworks** such as the Anti-Racism Action Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Social Pillar. Ireland's NRRP makes no mention of Roma, Travellers, minority ethnic groups, or racism, and the implementation of measures across employment, education, housing and health has **not brought tangible improvements to Travellers and Roma** or tackled entrenched gaps with the majority population.

ERGO Network response to the Spring Package 2024

In **Romania**, our members state that it is **encouraging that the Roma are mentioned several times** in the Country Report. However, these **references feel pro-forma**, with insufficient analysis of the phenomena described. **Progress is described numerically**, without qualitative analysis of the data presented. It is felt that **the methodology used for these Reports is antiquated** and only yields **stereotypical conclusions**. It is good to reconfirm that the situation is dire, but it is not new.

In **Slovakia**, our members' assessment is that **the Country Report contains basic statements that are repeated** every year, which are correct as they describe a very well-known situation. However, there is no further elaboration on these statements, and there is a **lack of any causal explanation** of the described situations, while more analysis would be highly beneficial.

Civil society is mentioned in 8 Country Reports (CZ, DK, GR, HU, IE, LV, SK, SI), which is twice the 2023 figure, but there is only one punctual reference in each Report. In the Czech Republic, it is referred to in the context of **increasing the ownership of the green transition**. In Denmark, civil society is part of a national energy crisis task force, but the country's processes for **stakeholder engagement is criticised as poor**. In Greece, the Country Report states that it is essential to involve civil society in the **delivery of the NRRP**, while Hungary is urged to improve the quality of its involvement of stakeholders, especially since new legislation significantly **limits civil society's right to policy consultation**. References to fostering the **participation of civil society in decision-making** are present in the Country Reports for Latvia and Slovenia, while Ireland and Slovakia are urged to **improve stakeholder involvement**, including engaging civil society in the latter.

Our members think that the European Commission is **missing a great opportunity** to call on Member States to foster wide stakeholder participation, in order to ensure both **evidence-based solutions, as well as ownership and transparency**. The desk officers in the European Commission, as well as the European Semester Officers stationed in Member States, can play a significant role in **bridging the civil dialogue gap, by pro-actively reaching out to civil society organisations**, particularly those representing marginalised and vulnerable communities, such as the Roma, in order to ensure that their concerns are taken on board in an adequate way in the Country Reports.

Roma in the Country-Specific Recommendations 2024

For the **Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs)** this year, once again the European Commission explicitly opted to focus on **the same three dimensions for all Member States**: fiscal policy, including fiscal and structural reforms; continuing or accelerating the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, including the new REPowerEU chapters; and the clean energy transition. In addition, “where relevant”, **some Member States received a third and fourth Recommendation**, on outstanding and/or newly emerging **competitiveness challenges**, thus reinforcing the unfortunate policy focus of the Country Reports. The CSRs also aim to identify issues that are only partially or not addressed by the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, as well as to take stock of **Cohesion Policy programmes** in light of the upcoming mid-term review.

This approach is similar to last year, moreover the Recommendations themselves do not seem to differ much between 2024 and 2022-2023 for the same country. This pattern of uniformisation and repetition **weakens the link between the Country Reports and the Country-Specific Recommendations**, where the former were supposed to underpin the latter and inform their content. Encouragingly, however, the Commission **continues to monitor the Country-Specific Recommendations issued since (and including) 2019**, which also comprise CSRs on Roma inclusion addressed to Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

Out of 27 Member States, **only the Country-Specific Recommendations for Slovakia mentions the Roma**: *“Strengthen the teaching of basic skills, including for children from disadvantaged backgrounds such as from marginalised Roma communities, and increase the availability and use of affordable high-quality early childhood education and care for children under the age of 3.”* Additionally, the Roma are mentioned twice in the Preamble of the Slovak CSRs, regarding strengthening their **social and economic inclusion** by improving their living conditions, ensuring access to high-quality non-segregated education and training and supporting their integration in the labour market, as well as pointing out a pronounced **attainment gap for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds**, including from marginalised Roma communities. We are **very pleased with these comprehensive references** and with the CSR itself.

However, the living conditions, quality of life, and wellbeing of Roma have not improved in the other Member States, including the other three countries who received a Roma Country-Specific Recommendation in 2019 (BG, RO, HU). Given the very limited progress, **we would have expected at least for these CSRs to be repeated** in 2024. However, as the Roma are mentioned in at least 6 countries' National Recovery and Resilience Plans, the Recommendation calling for Member States to implement their NRRPs can be construed as an implicit urging to also act on the Roma measures in the Plan. Nonetheless, **the opportunity was lost to highlight gaps in the NRRPs**, as well as to target those countries whose Plans do not mention the Roma at all. This approach would have also strengthened links with the delivery of the EU and National Roma Frameworks.

Other important concepts for Roma rights and inclusion, such as **ethnic minorities, antigypsyism, racism, and discrimination are completely absent from all 27 Country-Specific Recommendations**, save for two nominal references to discrimination in the Preambles for Austria and the Netherlands. This trend is, unfortunately, consistent with the Spring Packages of 2022 and 2023, which also included no references to any of these issues. These are strikingly absent dimensions in the current climate, where **discrimination is rampant all across Europe** for all racialised communities, including the Roma.

Our national members and partners expressed their disappointment at the fact that none of their countries received a Country-Specific Recommendation that mentioned Roma concerns. Equally, for many, the Country Report this year didn't include any reference to the Roma either.

"We regret that the Country Report and Country-Specific Recommendations do not mention the Roma in Austria and the problems they face. Despite the National Roma Framework, the situation remains concerning. Regarding education, the situation of Roma school-age children has somewhat worsened due to reduced state financial support for the project "Roma School Mediation". In the field of employment, based on specific guidelines of the Ministry of Economy and Labour "Roma Empowerment für den Arbeitsmarkt 2023-2030", projects are currently underway aimed to facilitate Roma access to the Austrian labour market, which is positive."

Romano Centro, Austria

“The lack of reference to Roma and Travellers in the Belgian Country Report is totally inexplicable given the importance of the issue in public debate. The recent election campaign in Flanders included antigypsyist remarks by the president of the biggest left-wing party, while in Wallonia antigypsyist local politician Benoît Hons was allowed to walk free. Local and social media are full of reports and reactions against Travellers. These are few examples of the particularly sensitive situation of Roma and Travellers in Belgium and the lack of inclusion and housing policies.”

Centre de Médiation des Gens du Voyage et des Roms, Belgium

“Despite Roma unemployment, poverty, and early school-leaving being highlighted in the Preamble, it is very disappointing that there is no mention of the Roma in any of the Country-Specific Recommendations. Many measures in the CSRs targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups could also benefit Roma, but without direct references to them national authorities also neglect these issues and do not put adequate efforts toward their resolution.”

Integro Association, Bulgaria

“We are amazed at the disconnect between the Czech Country Report, which includes repeated references to the many challenges faced by the Roma across a very broad range of issues, and the complete lack of mentions in the Country-Specific Recommendations. While we would have expected some consistency between the two documents, there is poor correlation and they do not seem to go hand in hand, as the CSRs only seem to focus on certain macro issues.”

Life Together, Czech Republic

“The Country Report for Finland, which has a strong focus on the challenges faced by the Finnish economy, lacks a fundamental, human rights and equality approach. It almost does not directly mention any group at risk of inequality, discrimination, and racism in Finland. Social and economic rights are unfortunately not equally accessed by racialised groups and minorities, such as Roma. It is important that poverty and social deprivation are understood in relation to racism, antigypsyism, sexism, ageism, and other forms of discrimination. It would be extremely important that civil society, including Roma, is included in the drafting of the Country Reports.”

The Finnish Roma Association, Finland

"We are dismayed by the European Commission's apparent lack of concern for the issues affecting the Roma and Sinti communities in the German Country Report and Country-Specific Recommendations. It is deeply concerning that no mention was made of the Roma and Sinti communities, including those who have fled from Ukraine, the racism and discrimination they face on a daily basis, the rising cases of antigypsyism in the media and political spheres due to the rise of the extreme right in Germany. These are critical issues that are highly relevant to the current situation in Germany"

Amaro Drom, Germany

"The Country-Specific Recommendations make no reference to Traveller and Roma inclusion, instead focusing primarily on the green and digital agendas. Several issues reprinted in the CSRs (access to drinking water, changes to the healthcare system, or reducing energy poverty) would be incredibly important for the Traveller and Roma communities, but useful links are not made."

Pavee Point, Ireland

"We urge the European Commission to include explicit references to the Roma, Sinti, and Camminanti (RSC) in the next Country Report and Country-Specific Recommendations for Italy. We denounce in-work poverty and recent developments in the basic income schemes, which most severely affect RSC communities. Addressing RSC as a specific target in enlarging access to services in social, health, housing and education fields can provide a significant lever to address structural inequalities, with a specific focus on RSC youth and women in policies regarding digital exclusion, energy poverty and child educational poverty."

ROMNI Association, Italy

"We express deep disappointment that the Roma are not mentioned in the Country Report or the Country-Specific Recommendations for Lithuania. However, this fact did not come as a surprise to us. The issues that Roma face are transferred to social policies, where they are seen as citizens with equal rights. But the discrimination of Roma, antigypsyism, is not recognised. We hope that the Law of National Minorities, the draft project of which has been submitted for consideration to the Lithuanian Parliament, will change the situation."

Vilnius Roma Community Centre, Lithuania

"Neither the Country Report for Poland nor the Country-Specific Recommendations address the Roma living in the country or the challenges they face. This is a pity, because one gets the impression that the situation of the Roma is deliberately not discussed, as such recognition would require the government to act. There is similar resistance to the concept and general definition of antigypsyism, which is being ignored by the government. The European Commission could do more to put these important issues on the national agenda."

Jaw Dikh Foundation, Poland

"FAGiC is very disappointed by the lack of priority that the European Commission gives to the Roma people and their issues in the Spanish Country Report and in the Country-Specific Recommendations once again. The fact that the Roma are not mentioned at all while Spain is one of the Member States with the highest Roma populations highlights the lack of efforts by the Commission to support the integration of all minorities. Once again, we miss an opportunity to advance Roma integration and the fight against antigypsyism in Spain and in Europe."

Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia – FAGiC, Spain

"We are disappointed that neither the Swedish Country Report nor the Country-Specific Recommendations mention measures or targets to combat inequality, discrimination or racism regarding the Roma national minority or other marginalised minorities. The Swedish National Roma Inclusion Strategy has already been effective for 12 years without delivering concrete results that would affect Roma life and ensure equal access to education, labour market, housing and health. If the European Commission would instead emphasize these issues, it could play an important role for advancing Roma inclusion and antigypsyism within national policies."

Trajosko Drom, Sweden

Positively, **25 out of the 27 Country-Specific Recommendations** (or all Member States, except Cyprus and Spain), **include the same reference to civil society** in the Preambles to their Country-Specific Recommendations: *"The systematic involvement of local and regional authorities, social partners, **civil society** and other relevant stakeholders remains essential to ensure broad ownership for the successful implementation of the recovery and resilience plan"* (our bold).

This is a very welcome reference, which we hope national Governments will heed accordingly, given that our members report **that national civil society engagement in the design, delivery, and implementation of the NRRPs has left a lot to be desired**. Additionally, the Preamble for Slovakia includes an additional urging to improve partnership and ownership, “including through stronger involvement of **civil society stakeholders**” (our bold).

Unfortunately, **none of the CSRs themselves refer to civil society**, while this was the case in 2022 for Hungary, then creating a useful precedent. Equally, while full involvement of civil society in the Recovery and Resilience Plans is welcome, **civil dialogue should be the norm also for other – in fact – for all – policy processes** of the European Semester, as well as at national level. We stress that involving beneficiaries and their civil society organisations in policy processes in a structured and meaningful way should be **an essential component of democracy and policy-making**, in order to both foster **broad ownership** of the solutions, as well as to ensure their **effectiveness**.

Conclusions

Overall, while **our members welcome references to Roma communities in more countries**, they lament that most of the Spring Package 2024 doesn't explicitly mention them, whereas **the Roma are present in all Member States except Malta**, and experience rates of poverty and social exclusion of over 80% in most of them, and almost 100% in some. This situation was exacerbated by **the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the rising cost of living** and energy price spikes. As the Package itself highlights these very challenges, it would have warranted **more attention paid to one of Europe's most left-behind communities**.

The recurrent focus on competitiveness as well as productivity and curbing public spending spells **dire times for social inclusion, human rights, and equality**. It is our members' experience that, unless the Roma are explicitly named as key target beneficiaries of support measures, and unless specific measures and resources are dedicated to them, **mainstream initiatives and broad national and EU funds end up not reaching them**. Europe's Roma must be specifically prioritised in the EU's Recovery Package and associated funds, if the EU is serious about delivering on its commitments for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation by 2030.

Our members equally express disappointment that issues of **discrimination and antigypsyism are largely absent from the present Package**, while these phenomena have increased in recent years. The fact that the country analyses and recommendations **do not seek to establish explicit synergies with the EU and national Roma Frameworks**, and with the National Action Plans against Racism, is considered a significant missed opportunity.

Finally, ERGO Network members deplore the **lack of recognition and support given to civil society organisations** in the two country documents, given that most of them are not only **on the frontlines**, providing essential support to communities in need, but they equally possess the knowledge, expertise, and **direct links to beneficiaries** which are needed to inform the design of **sustainable and effective public policies**.

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* 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](#).