

M

FROM PROMISES TO
GUARANTEES

ERGO
N E T W O R K

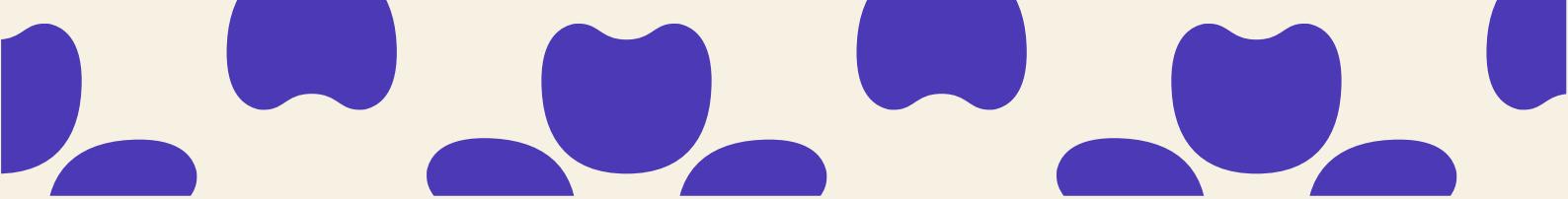
F

F



ENSURING ROMA
INCLUSION IN THE
MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL
FRAMEWORK 2028–2034

Policy Recommendation
prepared by Stelina Dungaj



MFF 2028-2034 (Multiannual Financial Framework) is the long-term European Union budget which allocates funds over the EU priorities for a period of at least 5-7 years. MFF plays a crucial role in powering EU policies both within and beyond its borders.

Early in May 2025, a [**public consultation**](#) took place, which critically overlooked Roma-specific needs – despite overwhelming evidence of persistent inequalities and other important aspects such as the Social Inclusion component for the Roma minority.

Mentioning only “vulnerable communities” as a broad concept does not reflect the Roma community, or provide the full picture of what is going to be included and what not – making civil society organisations quite sceptical and more vigilant on being fast to react in order to ensure that the social component is not missing for the Roma community in the upcoming EU budget.

ERGO NETWORK PUBLISHED ITS FIRST POSITION ON THE MFF PROPOSAL IN MAY 2025, WHERE THE **MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS DRAFTED WERE:**

1. TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN THEMATIC AND HORIZONTAL ENABLING CONDITIONS

This would help to align investment with national strategies that reflect the European Pillar of Social Rights, e.g. employment, education, healthcare, housing & inclusion and moreover with the CSOs still being active and involved in every stage of the process.

2. ENSURE THAT EU COHESION POLICY STANDS AS A CENTRAL PART OF THE MFF

Through instruments such as ESF+ and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), targeted funding is provided for marginalised groups, including Roma.

3. ESF+ SHOULD REMAIN A STANDALONE FUND

Dedicated support should be given for social inclusion, poverty reduction and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

4. ENFORCEMENT OF THE RULE OF LAW CONDITIONALITY TO PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND COMBAT STRUCTURAL RACISM

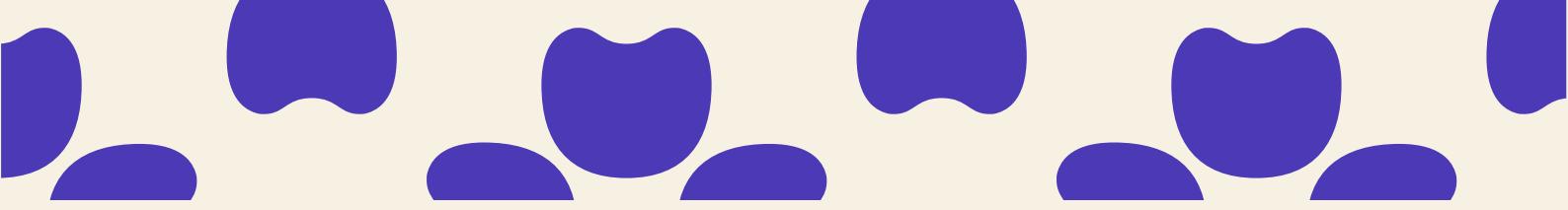
5. SAFEGUARD AND STRENGTHEN CERV AS A STANDALONE FUND

Essential for the delivery of the Union of Equality and it also plays a vital role in enabling Roma-led advocacy, inclusion and antidiscrimination efforts.

ERGO Network, together with other Civil Society Organisations, was waiting for the second publication that the European Commission would share with the public on how the budget allocation would be made, counting on the emphasis it has already placed on the EU's current priorities.



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



On the 16th of July 2025, the Commission presented its [**second proposal on the MFF**](#) with key features on:

- Flexibility of the budget to make it more accessible to Europe to act fast in case new policies need to be addressed
- Streamlined and harmonised so that the citizens can easily find and access funding opportunities
- A budget tailored to local needs, with National and Regional Partnership Plans for investments and reforms, for targeted impact where it matters most and ensuring a faster and more flexible support for more economic, social and territorial cohesion across our Union;
- A powerful competitiveness boost, for Europe to secure supply chains, scale-up innovation, and lead the global race for clean and smart technology;
- A balanced package of new own resources that ensures adequate revenues for our priorities while minimising pressure on national public finances.

Even though this funding seems very promising, it lacks a detailed clarification of who is specifically going to benefit from it. The vulnerable communities, such as Roma, are not mentioned even though across Europe, only 43% of Roma are employed, and 80% of them are at risk of poverty (vs. 21% EU average) – making it a critical issue to address to ensure that Roma are not left behind in this process.

The Commission's plans introduce some promising mechanisms for inclusivity, but we express caution about their sufficiency. For the first time, a dedicated social spending target (14%) is set across the entire budget, to be tracked and reported Union-wide. Funding for education and employment is not just an afterthought but a quantifiable priority if it would clearly address the groups that it would also prioritise in the process. The preservation of the European Social Fund+ within the new framework – with its mission of "supporting social inclusion, equal opportunities for all, and fighting poverty" – ensures continued EU investment in programs. However, there is still a big need for vulnerable communities, minorities and people facing disadvantages to be mentioned in the budget explicitly.

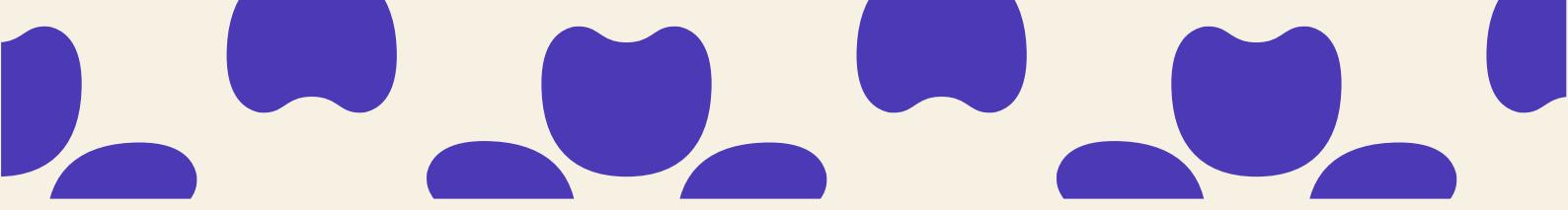
The 14% social target – covering so many areas – may be too low or too vague to ensure robust funding for particular needs (e.g. dedicated Roma inclusion projects, disability services, or migrant integration programs).

There is concern that merging cohesion funds into larger envelopes gives Member States more discretion to set priorities, which could sideline minority-focused initiatives if national governments lack commitment. This lack of explicit guarantees raises the risk that minority and social programmes might compete with other priorities within the same funding pot.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current [**MFF 2020-2027**](#) embeds one of the EU's strongest participatory safeguards: Article 8 of the Common Provisions Regulation obliges governments to involve civil society, including Roma organisations, equality bodies and human rights NGOs, in the design, delivery and monitoring of EU funds. This has been a cornerstone for ensuring that EU money reaches the Roma communities it is intended to support, and that investments do not perpetuate segregation, discrimination or exclusion.

Yet the new proposal for the MFF 2028-2034 dismantles these protections. The shift to National and Regional Partnership Plans removes the explicit partnership article, the reference to the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, and the obligation to include Roma civil society at every stage. In practice, this opens the door for Member States to plan and implement EU funds without Roma voices, without Roma expertise, and without Roma oversight. At a time when antigypsyism is rising, weakening participation rules will only reinforce structural inequalities.



It is essential that the new MFF restores binding, enforceable partnership obligations, guaranteeing Roma civil society a seat at the table – not as a courtesy, but as a legal and political right.

All these are concerns that we raise, therefore ERGO Network emphasises the need for more explicit policies that ensure that Roma are part of the agenda.

1. EXPLICITLY NAME ROMA IN THE MFF

The 14% social target is a step forward, but without naming Roma, there's no guarantee funding will reach them. Explicit inclusion would ensure accountability and visibility of Roma within any "vulnerable groups" category.

2. RECOMMENDATION 2: RESTORE THE BINDING PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

The current MFF embeds Article 8 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), which is a binding, enforceable legal safeguard obliging governments to involve Roma civil society in all stages (design, delivery, monitoring).

The new proposal dismantles this protection, removing the explicit partnership article and the legal obligation to include Roma voices and expertise.

ERGO Network asks to:

- Restore binding, enforceable partnership obligations, institutionalise civil society and Roma-led monitoring as a legal right.
- Dedicate funding to support the capacity-building of Roma-led organisations to act as equal partners.
- Require Roma-specific data collection and formally involve Roma-led NGOs in monitoring national plans.

3. STRENGTHEN MONITORING & ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Independent civil society organisations (including Roma-led NGOs) should be formally involved in monitoring national and regional Partnership Plans. The streamlined structure risks diluting accountability. Requiring Roma-specific data collection ensures transparency, helping to track whether the 14% social spending truly benefits Roma.

4. ENSURE CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

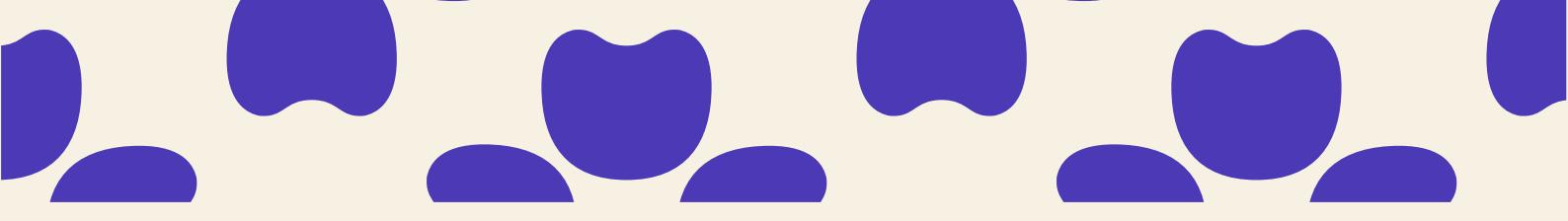
National and Regional Plans are central in implementation, but without Roma-led involvement, these plans may overlook Roma needs. Institutionalising civil society and Roma-led monitoring improves alignment and effectiveness.

Include and ensure mandatory partnership with civil society (especially Roma organisations) in all stages of programming, implementation, and evaluation of MFF funds.

Funding should include dedicated support for the capacity-building of Roma-led organisations, ensuring they can act as equal partners.

5. SAFEGUARD SOCIAL SPENDING TARGETS FROM DILUTION

The 14% social spending target must be treated as a minimum baseline for investment in social inclusion and poverty reduction, with scope to increase in countries where Roma and other marginalised groups face disproportionately high levels of poverty and social exclusion.



Proposing budget flexibility is a double-edged sword: while enabling fast responses to emerging needs, it can also lead to dilution or downgrading of social spending commitments. By securing the 14% target as a binding floor rather than a flexible reference point, the EU can ensure that social cohesion – not fiscal convenience – drives spending priorities.

To prevent this, the 14% target should be clearly defined, ring-fenced, and linked to measurable outcomes for social inclusion. Strengthening the target requires:

- Legally anchoring the minimum social allocation in EU cohesion policy regulations and performance frameworks.
- Introducing monitoring and corrective mechanisms to ensure Member States maintain or increase social spending levels, particularly in areas with high Roma exclusion rates.
- Integrating Roma inclusion indicators into the European Semester and ESF+ performance reviews to track the real impact of social expenditure.

6. LINK FUNDING TO ANTI-DISCRIMINATION COMMITMENTS

Linking EU funding to anti-discrimination commitments is a both political necessity and practical tool. While the proposal signals conditionality, it fails to acknowledge structural and systemic antigypsyism or broader racism and discrimination against Roma and other racialised communities.

Compliance with anti-discrimination and equality legislation, including National Roma Strategic Frameworks and National Anti-Racism Action Plans should be formally integrated into ex-ante conditionalities and monitored through the European Semester and performance review mechanisms.

7. PROTECT AND EXPAND FUNDING FOR ROMA EQUALITY UNDER AGORAEU

The merging of programmes such as CERV under AgoraEU risks diluting resources needed to address structural antigypsyism and support Roma civil society. The Programme must therefore guarantee dedicated and earmarked funding for Roma equality, Roma-led organisations, and the fight against antigypsyism, as broad anti-discrimination calls alone cannot meet these needs.

Such dedicated funding is essential to operationalise the EU Roma Strategic Framework, strengthen grassroots Roma organisations, and ensure accessible tools such as small-grant schemes and simplified procedures, so that Roma communities can fully benefit from the Programme.

To see the full feedback ERGO Network submitted to the European Commission, click [here](#).

8. INTEGRATE ROMA INCLUSION INTO THE GREEN & DIGITAL TRANSITION

The MFF pushes competitiveness, clean tech, and regional impact, but Roma are at risk of exclusion from these transitions. Partnership plans should ensure Roma-oriented access to these strategic investments in order to enable access to green jobs, digital skills, sustainable housing, and innovation opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The next Multiannual Financial Framework will serve to show the commitment of the EU to equality and cohesion, and the budget is the tool they have in their hands. Roma Inclusion in this budget cannot and should not be overlooked. With persistent gaps in education, employment, access to healthcare, and living conditions, targeted investment is essential, not optional.

To meet the EU's 2030 targets and uphold the European Pillar of Social Rights, Roma inclusion must be a clear, cross-cutting priority in the next EU budget.