

ERGO Network reacts to the EU Civil Society Strategy

What's in it for Europe's Roma¹?

On 12 November 2025, the European Commission adopted the [EU Strategy for Civil Society](#) and the [European Democracy Shield](#). Together, they contain measures to **protect the key pillars of our democratic systems**: free people, free and fair elections, free and independent media, a vibrant civil society and strong democratic institutions. The EU Civil Society Strategy seeks to address key challenges such as fragmented and **insufficiently meaningful participation, shrinking civic space, funding pressures, and legal and administrative barriers**.

ERGO Network actively engaged in the preparation of the Strategy, through meetings, thematic focus groups, and written consultations. ERGO Network also contributed to discussions on how the Commission **defines civil society**, how to **exclude extremist actors** from this space, and how to **better reach smaller and marginalised organisations**, including Roma NGOs. While these consultations were valuable and appear to have informed the overall direction of the Strategy, the final text remains **broad and less specific than many organisations had hoped**.

It is a missed opportunity that **Roma, ethnic minorities, or racialised communities are not mentioned in the Strategy**, nor are their civil society organisations. It is moreover regrettable that the initiative **does not meaningfully address discrimination and racism** as structural barriers to participation. While the text acknowledges that civil society working on fundamental rights and vulnerable communities is particularly affected by shrinking civic space, it **stops short of embedding a strong equality and anti-racism dimension**. Crucially, it also **does not establish any clear links with the Union of Equality**, including the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Anti-Racism Action Plan, despite their direct relevance for civil society organisations working on equality and inclusion at national and EU level.

¹ 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](#).

At the same time, we warmly welcome **the Strategy itself as both timely and relevant** in a context of waning civil dialogue, increasing pressure on civil society organisations, and constrained funding opportunities at both national and EU level. Its **horizontal nature**, developed across the European Commission rather than within a single Directorate-General, is a **positive step towards a more systemic approach** to engaging civil society across policy areas. The Strategy also usefully **recognises civil society as a partner in governance** and emphasises the need for an enabling, safe and supportive environment, as well as for more sustainable and transparent funding.

However, the Strategy **remains limited in terms of concrete new measures**. Much of its content builds on existing instruments and initiatives, offering a useful framework and guiding principles, but relatively few genuinely new commitments. While new platforms, networks and knowledge hubs are proposed, it remains **unclear to what extent Roma civil society will be meaningfully included**, particularly smaller, grassroots and minority-led organisations. There is a real risk that larger, more established organisations will continue to dominate participation and agenda-setting.

The Strategy **does not place civil society on an equal footing with social partners**. While trade unions and employers' organisations benefit from institutionalised and, in many cases, mandatory consultation mechanisms, **no equivalent legal obligation exists for civil society participation**. Strengthening civil dialogue to the same level as social dialogue remains a crucial advocacy demand, not only in terms of recognition but also as a **pathway to more stable and adequate funding**.

Overall, we consider the EU Strategy for Civil Society a welcome and necessary initiative, but **not yet a sufficiently strong instrument**. Continued advocacy towards its implementation will be needed to **ensure that Roma organisations are genuinely included**, and that civil society participation becomes not just a guiding principle, but a **structural reality in the EU**.*

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