



## **EUROPEAN COMMISSION RELEASES THE FIRST EU ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY**

### *WHAT'S IN IT FOR EUROPE'S ROMA<sup>1</sup>?*

On 6 May 2026, the European Commission published the **first-ever EU [Anti-Poverty Strategy](#)**, as part of a comprehensive Social Package which also includes a proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting **housing exclusion**, a communication on strengthening the European **Child Guarantee** and one on the rights of **persons with disabilities**. For **ERGO Network**, **ending Roma poverty in Europe is a key overarching objective**, and as such we have closely engaged with the run-up to the strategy, through our input position paper [Ending Roma poverty in Europe](#), organizing a **dedicated webinar** between Roma experiencing poverty and the drafting team, **meeting European Commission Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu** at the Porto Social Forum, providing expert input to the **European Parliament and United Nations reports**, and engaging actively with the **Anti-Poverty NGO Coalition**, including the *Anti-Poverty Day* at the European Parliament. We **reviewed the proposed Strategy** in light of this comprehensive work, and the results of this exercise are reprised below in this response paper.

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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 that **the Roma are explicitly mentioned** in the Strategy: “Prejudice and stigma also affect [...] persons with a minority racial or ethnic background, **in particular Roma** (70% are at risk of poverty)” (page 12, our bold). The text goes on to reaffirm that the Commission will “continue to work with Member States and other stakeholders to develop **anti-poverty measures targeted at specific groups**”, and explicitly highlights the **Roma poverty-reduction target** from the **EU Roma Strategic Framework**. We are very pleased to see this kind of correlation explicitly referenced, as this has been a long-standing demand of ours.

We are equally delighted to see **discrimination clearly acknowledged** as the first of the three **horizontal challenges that aggravate poverty**. This has been another key ask from ERGO Network, as we maintain that antigypsyism is the core of Roma exclusion, including Roma poverty. Unfortunately, **antigypsyism as such is not mentioned** by name. Also regrettably, the Strategy **does not put forward any new measures to combat discrimination**, relying instead on existing provisions of the Strategies composing the Union of Equality, including the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the new Anti-Racism Strategy. **We consider this to be insufficient**. Nonetheless, there are also further references to discrimination throughout the text, and there is an initiative to **fight discrimination on socio-economic background** (also known as povertyism or classism).

From a broader perspective, ERGO Network considers the **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy a very positive step forward** and a much-needed and long-awaited initiative, at a time where 20% of Europeans experience poverty, and the **rates of Roma poverty exceed 70%, even over 90%** in some countries (Spain, Ireland). The document acknowledges that “delivering results requires **immediate and sustainable investments**”, that “combatting poverty is a **collective responsibility**”, and that the “the impact of poverty [*persists*] **along the whole life cycle**” (our bold). As such, the structure of the text is as follows:

- Chapter 1 looks into measures to **tackle poverty along the life cycle**.
- Chapter 2 assesses horizontal challenges and **dimensions that can aggravate poverty**
- Chapter 3 provides opportunities to improve **governance, funding and monitoring**

Each section within the chapters gives rise to at least one concrete follow-up initiative.

We appreciate the **rights-based approach and strong anchoring in the EU Charter of Fundamental rights**, the **holistic approach of prevention and protection**, as well the explicit framing of **integrated active inclusion approaches**, combining income support, access to services, and inclusive labour markets for those who can work. It is encouraging to have **the existing Social Pillar target of reducing the number of people in poverty by 15 million by 2030 reaffirmed**, as well as the commitment to **eradicate poverty in the European Union by 2050**.

However, while we do understand the logic, insofar as two targets have already been announced, the **absence of additional poverty-reduction targets is disappointing**. Firstly, there is no clarity on the implementation of the 2050 poverty eradication commitment **beyond 2030** when the Social Pillar Action Plan comes to an end, an aspect the Strategy could have provided. Second, the opportunity is lost to have included **sub-targets that capture the specific situation of key groups** who experience significantly different rates of poverty and social exclusion than the averages reflecting the majority population.

In this context, the link to the **existing Roma poverty-reduction target** in the EU Roma Strategic Framework becomes all the more significant, but this is **not the case for so many other groups** disproportionately affected by poverty, and there **is no requirement for Member States to integrate these perspectives** in their national anti-poverty strategies. **None of these underserved groups**, not even the ones clearly included under the Union of Equality, **received a dedicated follow-up action**. These could have complemented the separate initiatives provided for different age groups under the lifecycle approach.

We are very pleased with the **provisions on child poverty**, which fully acknowledge that what needs to be tackled is **family and household poverty**, looking at improving parental income through **quality jobs but also child benefits**, as well as broader social protection. The **reinforced European Child Guarantee** contains additional useful measures, including a specific **Guidance on Roma children**. In 2027, the Commission will propose a recommendation on **improving child benefits** so that they better deliver on **reducing child poverty**, a very welcome initiative.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the section dedicated to young people, which grossly **misdiagnoses youth poverty** as being caused by a state of not being in employment, education, or training (NEET). While being in a quality job can protect a young person from poverty, **being in education or training does not provide an income**. And yet, aside some general language about support services, nothing is said about improving young people's access to income, and **everything is loaded onto the Youth Guarantee**, which contains no income provisions. A Toolkit connecting the Child and Youth Guarantees was announced, which is potentially very interesting and also includes an **explicit funding opportunity for Roma youth**.

Regarding **working age**, the rhetoric on **quality jobs for those who can work is positive**, as well as the **individualised support strategies** for the labour market integration of different groups, action on quality work, wages, and **combatting in-work poverty**. We also appreciate the inclusion of **provisions for those who cannot work**, and the announcement of a dedicated compendium on non-take-up of minimum income is very positive. There is a commitment to ensure **old-age adequate income** but it is a bit vague, putting forward a mix of incentives to work longer, different pension schemes, and other benefits. The proposed **follow-up actions are fairly low-impact**: a report by the Social Protection Committee and a high-level dialogue within the Commission. However, the **Intergenerational Fairness Strategy** and the upcoming **Longevity Roadmap** might provide some sound policy setting for **tackling old-age poverty**.

The three identified **horizontal challenges that aggravate poverty** are **discrimination and stigma**, which we analysed above, meeting **basic needs in a context of rising cost of living**, and ensuring access to services. These are fairly short, one to two pages each. The **first section on discrimination and stigma** is the most relevant for ERGO Network, as it **contains all the references to Roma poverty** and to combatting prejudice and stigma. It is also the **shortest of the three**. The concrete initiative stemming from this section is to task the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) with producing a comparative **legal analysis about the socio-economic status as a ground of discrimination** and provide data about the significant **impact of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage on discrimination**. While this is welcome, it is neither a policy initiative, nor any measure to ensure intersectional discrimination is adequately combatted.

Regarding the **cost of living**, the section focusses on a few different dimensions, the first being **food security**, where rising food prices are to be 'monitored and tackled', but it is not specified how. **Energy and transport poverty** are another important aspect, where stronger commitments are made to protect consumers and particularly low-income households, as well as by updating the Commission Recommendation on Energy Poverty. There is also a paragraph on **improving financial literacy and access to financial services**, which is rather bizarre as it squarely **externalises protection against the increased cost of living to consumers**, while allowing the market to pursue unlimited profits unchecked. Last but not least, **housing is identified as a key factor** burdening household incomes, in a section that also points to homelessness and which recalls the **Council Recommendation on Housing Exclusion**, released at the same time.

Finally, the section on **access to services** rightly stresses the importance of both **social inclusion services** (social work, counselling etc) as well as **essential services** (housing, utilities, transport, education, healthcare etc. The aim is to **address barriers** such as cost, territorial inequalities, administrative complexity, stigma, and digital exclusion, and a **2027 Council Recommendation on easier and integrated access to services** is foreseen. The section also looks specifically at **the role of education, digital skills, and long-term care in preventing poverty**, announcing an **Education Package** with a support scheme for basic skills and a future **European Care Deal** to improve affordable and quality care services. It also commits to addressing climate change, crises, and disinformation through the upcoming **European integrated framework for climate resilience**. If implemented in a way that takes on board underserved groups, **including racialised communities such as the Roma**, these could have a very beneficial effect.

In terms of broad framing, it is very welcome that the Strategy **refrains from casting poverty as bottleneck to competitiveness**, which would have been a damaging angle that would have undermined the rights-based approach. This is a **refreshing change** given the recent European Commission discourse, seemingly obsessively concerned with economic growth rather than wellbeing and inclusion.

Also positively, the document reasonably **avoids the trap of over-focussing on employment as a silver bullet**. While the activation language is still fairly strong, it **consistently speaks of quality jobs**, and repeatedly emphasises **'for those who can work'**. These are incredibly positive elements. The emphasis placed on **ensuring adequate incomes** alongside **universal, free, quality public services** is very positive. However, **healthcare is conspicuously absent**, only being mentioned once in an enumeration. Additionally, there is only **one reference to social economy**, very narrowly pointing only to its employment potential and completely overlooking its role in service provision.

When it comes to the last chapter, dedicated to implementation (governance, funding, monitoring), it is encouraging to see that **the Commission calls on Member States to define or further strengthen their national anti-poverty frameworks**, and will put forward a **guidance document to support national Governments** to better implement the newly-released principles on anti-poverty policies. Each country is equally invited to appoint a **national Anti-Poverty Coordinator**, a welcome development. Additionally, and very importantly, it clearly states that **"New investments and reforms need to be poverty proof"** (their bold) and that the Commission **supports distributional impact assessments** in Member States.

The **role of the European Semester remains as thus far**, with no additional provisions on anti-poverty, deeming the mainstreaming of Social Pillar principles sufficient. We doubt this is the case. The Strategy also foresees strengthened cooperation with **the European Parliament Intergroup on Fighting Poverty**, as well as the Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee, including through a **Joint Action Plan on local anti-poverty action**, and a new **EU Social Inclusion Award for municipalities**.

The document, regrettably, foresees **no concrete mechanisms to involve civil society** in the design, implementation, and monitoring of EU and national anti-poverty policies stemming from the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The only line which mentions civil society organisations other than in an enumeration of stakeholders **simply defers to the recently-adopted EU Civil Society Strategy**. This approach deals a considerable blow to the transformative potential of the text.

Regarding the **participation of people experiencing poverty themselves**, one of the concrete follow-up initiatives is the scaling up of cooperation with them, including through a **dedicated forum** that would allow for structured consultation. However, no other details are provided on this initiative, for instance who will be a part of this forum and **how it will ensure diversity of people experiencing poverty**, as well as how would it operate and feed into policy processes. While a **Coalition against Poverty** is announced, bringing together socially responsible business and philanthropic organisations, there is **no place in it for civil society organisations**.

In terms of funding, the Strategy issues a clear call for investment, but **does not provide dedicated funding** and instead it **reverts to existing funds available** under different EU programmes. However, there are **no guarantees that Member States will use these funds for anti-poverty** measures, particularly in the context of the current fraught negotiations under the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

While we appreciate the willingness of the Commission to look at **new indicators around affordability and material deprivation** by 2028, we lament that there is **no foreseen disaggregation of collected data** by ethnic background, which means that Roma poverty might continue to flourish undetected. It is positive, however, that the new indicators **will contribute to the Social Scoreboard and the Social Convergence Framework**. However, the actual link with the European Pillar of Social Rights remains unclear, and **no actions or targets are foreseen for after 2028**, which raises questions about the implementation of the 2030 and 2050 targets.

Overall, ERGO Network **largely welcomes the Strategy as a decisive and encouraging first step** in the fight against Roma poverty in Europe, and we will continue to advocate for a **stronger focus on Roma rights and inclusion** in its implementation.

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*For more information on ERGO Network's work on ending Roma poverty and social exclusion, please contact Senior Policy Adviser **Amana Ferro** – [a.ferro@ergonetwork.org](mailto:a.ferro@ergonetwork.org)*

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