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# Inclusion of Roma and Travellers in the EU

## Issues and Challenges

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## 1. Introduction

Many EAPN members work directly on issues of Roma<sup>1</sup> Inclusion, but currently this work is insufficiently captured or profiled in EAPN work. It has also become an EU priority because of increasing discrimination and attacks on the Roma community. Roma have been identified as a priority group at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the National Strategic Reports on social protection and social inclusion, as part of the Social OMC. During 2010-11, it has become an overarching EU priority because of increasing discrimination and events of racist violence on the Roma communities. On April 5<sup>th</sup>, a proposal for the EU Framework for national Roma Integration Strategies was published, under the auspices of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

It is therefore a timely moment for EAPN to carry out a mapping on what our members are doing on Roma inclusion, to see how many members are working on these issues directly, and what their key concerns are, as a first step to developing our input in this area. The objective of this briefing is to set the EU Policy context and recent policy developments by informing our national networks and EU members about Roma issues at EU level.

## 2. Roma in the EU

There are around 10-12 million<sup>2</sup> Roma in Europe and more than half of them live in EU Member States. Romania is the country with the largest Roma community (about 500.000 in official statistics, but estimations range from 1 to 3 million), followed by Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Slovakia. Malta is the only EU Member State without indigenous Roma. The Roma are integral to European society and economy, but frequently face prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. Human rights violations against Roma are not always prosecuted by the authorities. The Roma are also disproportionately affected by poverty. While the average poverty rate for the whole of the EU is around 17%, the poverty rate for Roma is at least four times higher than this. In addition to this they are at high risk of human trafficking, not least because of their low socio-economic status.

Even though the EU ensures free movement and residence within its borders for all its citizens, some EU countries have evicted migrant Roma communities from their settlements or expelled them from the country. French authorities expelled more than 10.000 Roma in 2009 and 8000 in 2010, and Italian authorities have aggressively evicted Roma from their settlements (in e.g. Rome in 2011). Denmark and Sweden expelled some Roma in 2010, and Germany paid some Roma to return home in 2009. France sent some Roma home in 2010 on a “voluntary basis” with a small amount of money – but those who refused would have been eventually sent home without funds. One of the most outrageous deportations happened in 1992 when Germany deported tens of thousands of illegal immigrants to Eastern Europe – most of them Roma.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms “Roma” – similarly to political documents of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council – as an umbrella which includes groups of people who have more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Gens du voyage, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The data of this briefing is drawn from the reference documents listed in the end of the briefing.

Often Roma are also forced to move from their country of origin because of discrimination, and this is a problem everywhere in Europe – including in Romania and Bulgaria.

In addition, in many EU countries anti-Roma rhetoric and actions have been enforced by extremist and also mainstream political parties. All EU institutions have acknowledged the seriousness of the situation of Roma, but not enough actions have been taken.

### **3. Key areas of Roma exclusion**

#### ***Discrimination***

Roma are often victims of forced evictions, racist attacks, and police ill-treatment. In some countries they are prevented from obtaining citizenship and documents required for healthcare and social insurance. In most cases Roma discrimination is based on racial prejudice, and negative stereotyping has also been spread by politicians and mass media. Roma citizens continue to suffer negative discrimination and segregation in education, employment, healthcare, housing and access to social allowances in numerous Member States. For example in Slovakia authorities have used different methods to move Roma into single apartment blocks away from the city centre, and cuts on social benefits have only worsened the situation. In Italy, the Government's approach to Roma is that they are "nomads", and laws have been adopted in the 1980s and 1990s to "protect nomadic cultures" through the construction of segregated camps.

Racially motivated attacks are by far the worst form of discrimination against Roma. Within the last years there have been ethnically motivated killings of Roma in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, while in Romania, mobs have burned Roma homes and driven the Roma from their villages. In the 1990s in the Czech Republic alone 7 Roma were beaten to death. Hungary has faced a series of racist murders of Roma in the last couple of years. The police does not always protect Roma from these attacks, and Roma do not always report attacks that have caused them smaller injuries, because they have to fear discrimination from the police as well.

Roma communities face multiple, complex problems, which are all interrelated. They can't access education without decent housing, or obtain decent housing without jobs, or have jobs while being discriminated. This is why community mediators are very important – people who speak their language (both linguistically, as well as metaphorically speaking) – to conduct on-the-ground needs assessment and to bridge gaps between communities and the majority.

#### ***Education***

Roma children often don't perform as well as other children and they are also segregated into separate schools and discriminated in schools. A lot of Roma children are even placed in schools for the mentally disabled, e.g., a third of Roma children in the Czech Republic attend these special schools. Only 42% of Roma children complete primary school (EU average is 97,5%). Various factors have led to this: precarious health conditions; low learning motivation; gender-based differences; poor self image and poor school results; poor housing and living conditions; low educational attainment of parents; the need to get involved with seasonal work to support the family and help the parents; and a lack of Roma role models. A significant factor is that a lot

of Roma children in Eastern Europe speak Romani, and when they reach school they don't know a word of the country's official language.

"Roma" schools are often overcrowded and lack qualified teachers. The Greek Roma are in the most disadvantaged position in terms of education – in 2008 only 4% of them reported schooling with a duration of at least ten years. Furthermore, 35% of the Roma in Greece were illiterate in 2008 (compared to 11% in Poland, 10% in Romania and 5% in Bulgaria).

### ***Employment***

Roma employment rate is lower than that of other groups. This can be explained by the low primary school completion rate, a generally low level of literacy, and racism in the workplace together with the unwillingness of employers to hire Roma, often forcing them into undeclared or precarious work. The rate of Roma employed in paid jobs (self-employed or in full or part time jobs) in 2008 reached its maximum in the Czech Republic with 44%. On the other hand, only 17% in Romania and 18% in Poland claimed to have such jobs. It is very common that Roma are rejected from employment purely because they can visibly be identified as Roma. Those Roma who do work often encounter inequality and discrimination in conditions of employment, e.g., their wages are lower than those of their non-Roma counterparts.

Apart from low skills and discrimination, there are other reasons as well. One of them, very important, is the fact that the Roma traditional arts and crafts (metal working, jewel-making, straw-work etc.) are now being replaced by mass production and manufacturing factories. Knowledge and skills traditionally passed on from generation to generation are now obsolete on a competitive labour market.

### ***Health***

Roma have an average life expectancy rate of 10 years less than the majority population, and a 2-6 times higher than average child mortality rate. Reasons for this include poor living conditions, lack of access to quality healthcare, higher exposure to risks in general etc. Insufficient language skills may be a barrier, and cultural differences and misunderstandings in e.g. hospitals can prevent access to healthcare. In some countries, Roma don't have ID papers, or their children don't get declared or registered when born. This, combined often with a lack of an official address, hinders significantly their access to all sorts of services.

### ***Housing and other public services***

Spatial segregation is high amongst Roma; that is, they are living in areas predominantly populated by other Roma. In 2008 the rate was highest in Bulgaria (72%), Romania (66%), Slovakia (65%) and Greece (63%). Poland had the highest number of Roma living in majority neighbourhoods (53%). Roma housing conditions are generally poor. Rural Roma settlements are usually segregated and isolated from public services and they lack even the most basic infrastructure. Urban Roma settlements are usually integrated in majority society, but still lack access to welfare and public services and are unable to afford access to utilities. The Roma also lack knowledge on services and their own rights and responsibilities – and service providers lack training and resources. And again – the lack of fixed address is a serious problem. Many Roma

have built their own houses, on land which wasn't theirs, over 100 years ago, but they are not recognised any rights over that land, and hence can't use that address. The Government, central or local, often evicts them for that reason.

### **Minimum Income**

In the new Commission paper on Roma Inclusion, scant attention is paid to minimum income as a necessary pre-condition to support inclusion for the Roma population as part of an Active Inclusion approach. There is no comparable data available through [EU-SILC](#) for ethnic minorities including Roma. National data and EAPN inputs highlight difficulties in accessing adequate minimum income, due to residential criteria and discrimination in eligibility frameworks.

The European Roma Rights Centre highlights cases of direct discrimination against Roma where social workers are intent on cutting of benefits to Roma, because of prejudices against the Roma as work-shy and overly dependent on benefits. The European Parliament in its recent report on Roma Inclusion ((2010/2276 (INI)) highlights the importance of ensuring equal access to social assistance for Roma – underpinned by an Active Inclusion approach which ensures adequate minimum income, as well as access to services and an inclusive labour market.

## **4. EU tools for Roma inclusion**

### **EU legislation**

*The Race Equality Directive* is the key piece of EU legislation combating discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin. It was adopted in 2000 and it obliges Member States to give equal access to ethnic minorities (such as the Roma) in education, health, housing and employment.

The Commission has presented a proposal in 2008 for a new equality directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation – outside employment.

*The Free Movement of Persons Directive* (2004) is about the rights of EU citizens and their families to reside and move freely within the territory of the EU and EEA Member States.

*The Regulation on freedom of movement for workers within the Community* (1968) grants the right of equal treatment to EU workers who are employed in another EU country in relation to housing.

*The Framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia* (2008) aims to ensure that racism and xenophobia are punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties in the EU. It also aims to improve and encourage judicial cooperation in this field.

*The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* (2007) grants the right of access to health care.

*The Open Method of Coordination* for Social Protection and Social Inclusion: Roma have been identified as one of the key priority groups facing poverty and social exclusion as well as discrimination in National Strategic Reports and in the 2009 and 2010 Joint Report.

*The Active Inclusion Strategy* (based on the 2008 Commission Recommendation and endorsed by the EPSCO in Dec 2008) provides an important basis for an integrated approach to supporting Roma – ensuring adequate minimum income, access to quality work and access to services.

*The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion* aim at guiding EU institutions and Member States in the design and delivery of policies (constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies, explicit but not exclusive targeting, inter-cultural approach, aiming for the mainstreaming, awareness of the gender dimension, transfer of evidence-based policies, use of Community instruments, involvement of regional and local authorities, involvement of civil society, active participation of the Roma). These principles were annexed by EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers on 8 June 2009 to their Conclusions on the Inclusion of Roma.

### **Council of Europe legislation**

*The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance* (ECRI) is the key Council of Europe's **instrument** and independent monitoring body specialised in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance.

### **New Developments**

#### **Europe 2020**

Europe 2020 sets a poverty reduction target of 20 million by 2020 (based on 3 indicators – at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and jobless households). It is left up to Member States to set their own targets and sub-targets and to identify their key target groups. It is to be expected that Roma should be one of these, given their high levels of poverty, material deprivation and difficulties over accessing quality jobs. The European Platform against Poverty identifies Roma as a key priority. However, the main action on Roma is being driven by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights Viviane Reding.

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, the Commission put forward an [EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#), which will help guide national Roma policies and mobilise funds available at EU level to support inclusion efforts. The Commission proposes that national Roma integration strategies are designed or, where they already exist, are adapted to meet EU Roma integration goals. The Social Protection Committee published its Opinion on Roma Inclusion on 2 May, highlighting that the situation of Roma should be taken into account within the overall policy framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy through mainstreaming, particularly with a view to pursuing inclusive growth. On 19 May the EPSCO Council endorsed the Framework, which now moves towards endorsement by the European Council in June.

The Framework develops a targeted approach for Roma inclusion by setting goals in four areas, all of which are primarily national policy areas:

- Education: ensuring that all Roma children complete primary school;
- Employment: cutting the employment gap between Roma and other citizens;
- Health: reducing the gap in health status between the Roma and the general population;
- Housing: closing the gap in access to housing and public utilities such as water and electricity.

Key gaps in the Framework approach are:

- Lack of an integrated Active Inclusion approach
- Lack of a specific mention of adequate minimum income
- Lack of proactive measures to fight discrimination and segregation
- Lack of a specific focus on participation, empowerment and representation

The document highlights that the principle of equal treatment does not prevent Member States from maintaining or adopting specific measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin. A few Member States have already successfully used positive action in favour of Roma, considering that classical social inclusion measures were not sufficient to meet Roma specific needs.

Member States' national strategies should fit into and contribute to the broader framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and they should therefore be consistent with National Reform Programmes. Member States are requested to prepare or revise their national Roma integration strategies and present them to the Commission by the end of December 2011. In spring 2012 the Commission will assess these strategies and report to the European Parliament and to the Council about progress.

However, it is difficult to see how Roma Inclusion strategies will fit into the narrow guidelines of Europe 2020, and EAPN has consistently argued that such national strategies on Roma Inclusion need to be part of an overarching EU and national strategy for social protection and social inclusion, with a reinforced Social OMC.

### ***Decade of Roma Inclusion***

The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is a political commitment by 12 European governments to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma. It is an international initiative that brings together governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations, as well as Romani civil society, to accelerate progress toward improving the welfare of Roma and to review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way. The governments of the 12 countries have committed to closing the gap in welfare and living conditions between the Roma and non-Roma populations, as well as putting an end to Roma poverty and exclusion. Each of these countries has developed a national Decade Action Plan that specifies goals and indicators in the Decade's priority areas: education, employment, health and housing.

### ***EU funding***

All recent EU policy documents refer to Structural Funds as the key EU instrument to tackle Roma needs. The Platform against Poverty mentions [The European Social Fund \(ESF\)](#), [The](#)

[European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) and [The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\)](#) as financial tools for making EU funding deliver on the social inclusion and social cohesion objectives. Member States are however responsible for allocating and implementing funding for specific integration projects in the context of Europe 2020 and the reform of Cohesion Policy. The Commission has promised to work with national and regional authorities to make better use of EU funds for financing actions and initiatives that directly benefit the Roma population. The Commission also set up a high level task force in September 2010 to assess the effectiveness of Structural Funds spending for Roma Inclusion.

In April 2010, the Commission published a *Communication on Roma in Europe and Progress Report on Roma Inclusion 2008-2010*, which highlights the Commission's commitment to strengthening the impact of ESF and ERDF in promoting Roma Inclusion. The document states that there is generally no lack of funds, but a lack of political commitment in certain Member States to use Structural Funds for targeted actions on Roma. It is the first Commission policy Communication dedicated specifically to Roma.

[PROGRESS](#) has also been used, particularly to fund Peer Reviews and Studies under the Social OMC (SP&SI), and to raise awareness, and promote participation as well as transnational exchange projects. During the 2010 year for combating poverty, funding was used by EAPN members to promote direct participation of Roma (e.g. in Bulgaria).

### ***Governance and Partnership Mechanisms***

*The European Platform for Roma Inclusion* has brought together national governments, the EU, international organisations and Roma civil society representatives since 2008. The Platform meetings take place twice a year and they aim at stimulating cooperation and exchanges of experience on successful Roma inclusion policies and practices. The meetings have so far been organised by the Presidency, resulting in a weak role of the Commission. There should be a permanent contact point to ensure continuity of the work of the Platform. Commissioner Reding has called on the Platform to support the new Framework, and the Commission has decided to take a stronger role in the Platform and to reinforce the Platform's role, building on past experience and by linking its work with the four priority areas of national Roma integration strategies.

The European Commission also organises bi-annual, Presidency driven *Roma Summits* in order to bring together high level representatives of EU institutions, national governments and civil society organisations from all over Europe.

The EU's *High Level Group for the social and labour market integration of ethnic minorities*, set up under the Framework Strategy for Non-discrimination and Equal Opportunities, represents an opportunity to bring together the best expertise available on this topic.

### ***NGOs working directly on this area***

The European Commission promotes the involvement of Roma civil society in European decision making through the Platform for Roma Inclusion and the European Roma Summits. However the new Framework does not guarantee civil society consultation, and there was no consultation during the drafting of the Framework. 36 leading Roma and pro-Roma

organisations met in Budapest right after the publication of the Framework, and in addition to addressing its other shortcomings such as its weakness on discrimination and protection against fundamental rights violation and racist violence, a lack of ambition in the education target and a lack of a gender and youth dimension, they criticized the Commission for shutting Roma out of the policy-making process.

One major network working against Roma discrimination at EU level is *the European Roma Policy Coalition*, an informal gathering of NGOs operating on issues of human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, social inclusion, and Roma rights. It works through awareness raising and targeted advocacy towards the EU institutions and Member States. Its members are Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre, the European Roma Information Office, the Open Society Institute, Minority Rights Group International, the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, the Roma Education Fund, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, and the European Network against Racism (ENAR), which is also a member of EAPN. ENAR organised a campaign last year to protest against France's xenophobic policies.

## 5. The role of Member States in national monitoring

Member States have the primary responsibility for Roma integration, because the key areas of Roma inclusion are mostly national responsibilities. These include access to quality education, access to the job market, social assistance, housing and essential services, and healthcare.

Member States will be asked to submit national Roma strategies to the Commission by the end of 2011 (if they agree to commit to the proposed framework), specifying how they will contribute to achieving the overall EU level integration goals, including setting national targets and allowing for sufficient funding (national, EU and other) to deliver them. This will form a part of the contributions to the National Reform Programmes.

The Social Protection Committee is currently discussing the role of the Social OMC in Europe 2020 and whether there will be a continuation/adaption of national reports on social protection and social inclusion. If this is agreed, the National Strategies on Roma Inclusion should be linked to these overarching Social Inclusion strategies and then feed into the NRPs.

The Commission will report to the European Parliament and the Council annually on the progress of Roma integration in Member States and on the achievement of the Roma integration goals. The monitoring will be based on e.g. NRPs, the OMC, the Fundamental Rights Agency's (FRA) Roma Household Survey results, and Member States' own monitoring systems.

The Commission is also proposing solutions to make sure that EU funds are used more effectively to support Roma integration. EU countries are invited to amend their operational programmes co-financed by Structural Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to better support Roma targeted projects.

However, all Member States are committed to the common objectives of the Social OMC (SP&SI), which supports the access to rights, resources and services for all groups, as well as the mobilisation and participation of all actors, as well as having signed up to the Charter of Fundamental Rights which has legal weighting. Through the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU

makes clear the need for increasing economic governance and social coordination, to the common priorities and targets, including the poverty reduction targets.

## **6. EAPN key concerns**

- Fighting discrimination and ensuring equal access to rights, resources and services for Roma and Traveller Communities
- Developing integrated, multidimensional strategies which provide a coherent policy response to the barriers to social inclusion, including adequate minimum income, employment, housing, health, education and other services, through a life cycle approach
- Promoting the active participation and empowerment of Roma in the development, delivery and implementation of policy solutions
- Embedding national and EU strategies on Roma Inclusion in overarching national strategies on social protection and social inclusion, and national action plans on social inclusion, to feed into National Reform Programmes

## 7. References

### ***Some European level organisations working on Roma inclusion***

- [ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti issues](#)
- [Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015](#)
- [European Roma Policy Coalition \(ERPC\)](#)
- [European Network against Racism \(ENAR\)](#)
- [European Roma Information Office \(ERIO\)](#)
- [The European Roma Rights Centre \(ERRC\)](#)
- [Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions \(COHRE\)](#)
- [European Roma and Travellers Forum \(ERTF\)](#)
- [Minority Rights Group International \(MRG\)](#)
- [Open Society Foundations – Roma Initiatives](#)
- [The Roma Education Fund](#)
- [Fundación Secretariado Gitano](#)
- [Amnesty International on Roma](#)
- [Roma National Congress](#)
- [World Bank on the Roma](#)

### ***European institutions***

- [Council of Europe: Roma and Travellers](#)
- [European Commission: the European Union and Roma](#)
- [Fundamental Rights Agency: Roma and Travellers](#)
- [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#)
- [European Platform for Roma Inclusion](#)
- [European Roma Summits](#)
- [EU high level group for the social and labour market integration of ethnic minorities](#)

### ***Reference documents***

- [Council conclusions on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#) (2011)
- [Opinion of the Social Protection Committee on Roma Inclusion](#) (2011)
- [EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#)
- [European Parliament resolution: EU strategy on Roma inclusion](#) (2011)
- [Council conclusions on advancing Roma inclusion](#) (2010)
- [Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU](#) (2010)
- [EU projects in favour of the Roma community](#) (2010)
- [Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the EU](#) (2009)
- [Health and the Roma community: analysis of the situation in Europe](#) (2009)
- [Data in focus report - the Roma - FRA EU-MIDIS survey](#) (2009)
- [European Commission Staff Working Document: Roma in Europe - Progress Report](#) (2008-2010)
- [European Commission Staff Working Paper on Roma](#) (2008)
- [Consultation process on future FRA work on Roma and Travellers issues](#) (2008)

- [Report on Social Integration of Ethnic Minorities and their Full Participation in the Labour Market](#) (2007)
- [European Parliament study: The social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU](#) (2006)
- [The Situation of Roma in an enlarged European Union](#) (2004)

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