



ERIO's Recommendations to the Maltese EU Presidency

January-June 2017

Between January and June 2017, Malta assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at a crucial period for Europe. The climate of rising xenophobia fuelled by populist and extreme right nationalist parties has had a strong knock-on effect on Roma in the EU, as they are often targeted in the rhetoric of anti-immigration parties. As well as a surge in anti-Gypsyism and hate speech, instances of violence against Roma in several member states are also on the rise. **We call on the Maltese Presidency to speed up efforts to ensure Roma's equal treatment with respect to their fundamental rights.**

1. Maintain Roma inclusion as a priority in the EU political agenda

While the current refugee situation and the need to reform the Common European Asylum System understandably remain key EU priorities, it is important that these concerns do not replace the commitment EU institutions and member states have made to Roma inclusion. It is now more important than ever for national and EU officials to **speed up their work on Roma inclusion and to not let this priority be displaced by the refugee situation**. The latest findings of the FRA's EU-Midis II [report](#) demonstrate that, while already at the mid-term stage, the [EU Framework](#) for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 has only had very limited successes on the ground. The report indicates gross inequalities in living standards between Roma and non-Roma in the EU, which should be urgently addressed.

2. End anti-Gypsyism and guarantee the rights of Roma

It is reassuring to see that the Presidency placed rights of minorities and vulnerable groups as one of its priorities. As demonstrated by the European Parliament's [report](#), an increase in violence and discrimination against minorities and the protection of human rights is being challenged in many parts of Europe. According to the FRA's EU-Midis II [report](#), 41% of Roma felt discriminated against because of their ethnic origin in the past five years. **Roma urgently need to be protected from discrimination and violation of their rights**. Therefore, we ask the Presidency to work towards the **effective and urgent implementation of the [EU Framework](#) at the national, regional and local levels, compliant with the [2013 Council Recommendation](#) and the [2016 Council Conclusions](#)**, while ensuring Roma's participation in that process, particularly of Roma women and youth. Moreover, the Presidency should ensure that member states **horizontally adopt anti-discrimination legislation in the national system** in the different fields (i.e. education, health, housing and employment) and follow the recommendations outlined in the 2014 European Commission's implementation [report](#) on the [Racial Equality Directive](#). Member states should also be called upon to prevent the violation of Article 21 of the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#).



3. Maximise the full potential of all EU residents in the labour market, including the Roma women

We welcome the fact that the Presidency is focusing on improving the participation of women in the labour market. However, this should not only focus on high-end management positions in major enterprises, but should **equally target women in the most vulnerable social positions such as Roma women** who are in disadvantage due to their lack of formal education and discrimination they face daily. As the FRA's EU-Midis II [report](#) demonstrate, only 1 in 4 Roma aged 16 years or older reports being employed or self-employed. Roma women report much lower employment rates (16%) than Roma men (34%). The success of the social targets of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) relies to a great extent on **maximising the full potential of all EU residents, including minorities like the Roma in the labour market**. This could be done by **encouraging Roma entrepreneurship** as an alternative to improve Roma women's participation in the labour market and combat discrimination in recruitment. Additionally, this can help achieve the targets and implementation of the [EU Framework](#) and the [2013 Council Recommendation](#).

4. Ensure EU accession to the Istanbul Convention

ERIO welcomes the Presidency's prioritisation of ending violence against women. This is particularly important given that in Europe, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15¹. Moreover, ethnic minority women in particular, Roma women, are more likely to face attacks on their physical integrity, such as forced sterilisation which still occurs in Czech Republic and Slovakia. The EU accession to the [Istanbul Convention](#) would be a vital step to fight violence against women. As such, the Presidency should **encourage member states and the Council of the European Union to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention**. This will protect the lives of many women in Europe.

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The **European Roma Information Office (ERIO)** is an international advocacy organisation which promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing information to the EU institutions, civil society and governments. Through its wide network, it aims to combat racist discrimination against Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.

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¹ http://www.erionet.eu/doc-fact-sheet_violence-against-women