



European Roma Information Office

**ERIO position paper
on the EU Framework for National Roma
Integration Strategies and a post-2020
strategy as a contribution to the midterm
review of the European Commission**

March 2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission is carrying out a midterm assessment of the [EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#). The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this assessment. As a response to this consultation, ERIO has consulted with its members. This paper builds on the contributions of our network that we have received during March 2017. We are extremely grateful to all members who contributed to this consultation. The countries covered by the respondents are Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK. Moreover, the paper also builds on ERIO's vast experience on European policies for Roma inclusion. We have been actively involved in the EU Framework since its adoption in 2011 and in shaping European policies for Roma inclusion since ERIO's creation in 2003.

The need to adopt an EU-level comprehensive strategy to address the high levels of discrimination, exclusion and poverty faced by Roma has been long recommended by the European Parliament and civil society, including ERIO. In 2011, as a response to the events in France in the summer of 2010, the European Commission adopted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies which aims to improve the socio-economic situation of the Roma communities in Europe by assisting and guiding EU member states in developing a National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) in four key areas: access to education, employment, healthcare and housing and essential services.

ERIO considers the much-awaited EU Framework as a step forward towards guaranteeing Roma inclusion and equal treatment in Europe. However, the Framework with its strong social focus, fails to provide effective measures to tackle discrimination, anti-Gypsyism, hate speech and violence against Roma. To ensure the success of Roma related policies, measures need to acknowledge the interconnection of inclusion and anti-discrimination. The EU Framework was strengthened by the 2013 [Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states](#), unanimously adopted by member states, making it the strongest EU legal instrument for Roma inclusion. ERIO considers this recommendation to have a stronger anti-discrimination approach and providing good guidelines for member states to effectively implement their NRIS at both national and local level. The 2013 recommendation was the Commission's strongest signal to member states about the urgency to guarantee Roma inclusion and equal treatment.

Six years after the EU Framework's adoption, progress on the ground is still very slow. A large number of Roma still face high levels of poverty and continue to face discrimination in their daily lives and unequal access in healthcare, employment, education and public life, and anti-Gypsyism is increasing^{1 2}. Despite the latest EU efforts to guarantee the equal treatment of Roma, there are no concrete improvements at the local level. Below, we set out what ERIO and some of its members consider being the main achievements, concerns and key priorities for action at both EU and national levels.

¹ FRA (2016) Second EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey: (EU-MIDIS II) Roma – Selected findings <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

² European Commission (2016) Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma-report-2016_en.pdf

2. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF EU DEVELOPMENTS ON ROMA INCLUSION AND EQUAL TREATMENT

2.1 Main achievements at EU level

ERIO welcomes the following main achievements during the period 2011 to 2016:

- The European Commission's **political commitment** to Roma inclusion and equal treatment which is proving to be one of the biggest challenges the EU is currently facing. Roma inclusion has been **put high on the EU political and policy agenda**.
- The European Commission's efforts in **persuading all member states to adopt a National Roma Integration Strategy** despite the fact that the EU Framework is soft law thus not compulsory for member states to implement it. As part of these negotiations, specific **allocation of EU funds for Roma inclusion** has been ensured and considered as necessary for the effective implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies.
- The European Commission's use of its channels and instruments to initiate **infringement procedures** against member states for violation of EU anti-discrimination laws such as the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC). The initiation of infringement proceedings demonstrates the Commission's serious commitment to the fundamental EU principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination which lie at the heart of the treaties.

2.2 Key challenges and potential solutions

However, some key challenges still need to be addressed:

- The alarming **rise in nationalistic and populist political movements and discourses** across Europe which puts into question the founding EU values of equality and non-discrimination and undermines fundamental rights.

The best way to address this challenge during implementation up to 2020 is:

- The European Union institutions should take a clear and stronger stand against right-wing extremism, nationalistic and racist political movements and incitement to hatred by ensuring the **respect and promotion of the EU fundamental values**. The EU should also closely **monitor the state of fundamental rights** in member states when currently these rights are being challenged by many governments.
- The **current refugee situation is pushing Roma issues to the side-line of the political agenda** and is being used by many officials as an excuse to shift priorities and resources away from Roma inclusion, to stop or delay the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies since funding for the purpose of Roma inclusion are being redirected for the inclusion of refugees.

The best way to address this challenge during implementation up to 2020 is:

- The refugee situation is a current issue that needs to be brainstormed and discussed in order to see how we can ensure **Roma is kept as a priority** and not seen in competition with the refugees. There is a need for **solidarity** that does not create hierarchies between vulnerable populations (i.e. Roma and refugees).
- The **current monitoring on the use of EU funds** is proving to be weak since the funds are not being properly allocated and effectively used for Roma inclusion. In many cases, funds that could be used for Roma are instead used for other purposes thus not reaching the communities.

The best way to address this challenge during implementation up to 2020 is:

- Ensure a **better, effective and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the use of EU funds** allocated for Roma inclusion at the national and local level in order to guarantee the full and effective use of EU funds for Roma inclusion by member states. Roma civil society should also be consulted and included in the monitoring and evaluation process to monitor the use of EU funds and the impact of policies on the Roma communities.

2.3 Key European level priorities and actions up to 2020

ERIO believes that the following key priorities and actions should be taken up to 2020:

Priority 1: Active measures by the European Commission to end anti-Gypsyism and ensure equal treatment of Roma

- The European Commission should strengthen its efforts to ensure compliance of member states with EU anti-discrimination legislation, particularly the **Racial Equality Directive** by making use of **infringement procedures** or any other available means. The Commission should hold member states accountable and responsible for their treatment of the Roma population. Moreover, member states should also be pressured to effectively use their **national anti-discrimination law** to eradicate anti-Roma racist behaviour. Moreover, the Commission should carefully monitor any measures taken by the member states to support the institutional capacity of **Equality Bodies** through granting them adequate resources. Sufficient funding is a necessary prerequisite for Equality Bodies to effectively fulfil their role as “watchdogs for equality”.

Priority 2: Allocation by the member states of adequate funding for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies

- The European Commission should put more pressure on member states to **allocate more EU funds for Roma policies** (and not misuse, underuse or redirect them to other communities or causes) since this is a pivotal element of the national strategies, especially in countries with a large Roma population. The Commission should request that member states make the most use of the available financial instruments to promote measures to tackle anti-Gypsyism and promote Roma inclusion and equal treatment since the absorption rate of the ESF funds by member states remains very low. **Assistance to member states** should also be provided on how to use EU funds in a suitable manner.

Priority 3: Continue and improve dialogue and cooperation with EU level expert networks working on Roma issues

- The Commission should **continue financially supporting EU level expert networks** working on Roma issues so they can play a key role during the consultation process. These networks are of utmost importance in order to cooperate with the European Commission on Roma related and anti-discrimination policy processes and monitoring. Moreover, EU level networks through their mediation capacity have the added-value of making the link between the Commission and the Roma communities.

2.4 Key priorities and actions for a post-2020 European approach

A post-2020 European approach for Roma inclusion and equal treatment should focus on ensuring that the Roma issue is kept on the EU political and policy agenda. Amending the EU Framework and revising the National Roma Integration Strategies is also essential in order to reflect new realities which go beyond the current four pillars (i.e. education, employment, healthcare and housing) and with a stronger focus on anti-Gypsyism and discrimination. Moreover, the European Commission should pressure member states to horizontally adopt anti-discrimination legislation at national level in all policy fields related to Roma inclusion. Finally, the establishment of a rigorous financial monitoring system of EU funds allocated for Roma Inclusion is required to make sure funds are used properly and reach the Roma communities.

ERIO believes that the following key priorities and actions should be taken for a post-2020 European approach:

Priority 1: Amendments of the EU Framework and revision of the National Roma Integration Strategies

- The EU Framework with its strong social focus fails to provide effective measures to tackle anti-Gypsyism and discrimination. Similarly, the current National Roma Integration Strategies will be insufficient to address anti-Gypsyism if they continue to treat the problems Roma face as exclusively social or cultural problems, and do not seek to remedy discriminatory factors in laws, policies, regulations and practices. Therefore, the European Commission should amend the EU Framework and consequently pressure member states to revise and adapt their National Roma Integration Strategies to the **new realities that go beyond the current four pillars** (i.e. education, employment, healthcare and housing) and with a **stronger focus on anti-Gypsyism and discrimination**.

Priority 2: Horizontal adoption of anti-discrimination legislation at national level in all policy fields related to Roma inclusion

- The European Commission should pressure member states to **horizontally adopt anti-discrimination measures** in the national system in the different fields relating to Roma inclusion (i.e. education, health, housing and employment). Currently, anti-discrimination legislation is not a provision in the education, health, housing or employment national systems.

Priority 3: Setting-up a robust monitoring and evaluation of the EU funds for Roma inclusion

- The European Commission, in close cooperation with Roma civil society, should **improve its monitoring mechanism** of the EU funds for Roma inclusion which are currently not properly allocated and effectively used for that purpose. Despite the ESF 20% earmarked for social inclusion, poverty and discrimination, funds are not reaching the Roma communities. This could potentially be solved by having a budget line of the EU funds earmarked for Roma inclusion and equal treatment.

3. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS ON ROMA INCLUSION AND EQUAL TREATMENT

The information below was provided by some of our network members.

3.1 Belgium

According to some of our members in Belgium, some **key challenges** that still need to be addressed are:

- The fact that the government's main focus lies on the Travellers and Sinti communities in Belgium and tends to neglect Roma newcomers.
- **Weak involvement** of Roma organisations in the consultation process.
- **Security and terrorism issues have shifted the Roma issue** from the political agenda. The Roma issue is no longer a priority.

3.2 Bulgaria

According to some of our Bulgarian members, there is a general agreement that the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy is still a dead policy. This is mainly due to the unwillingness of the authorities to allocate funds for Roma inclusion. Due to a constant change of government, there has been an inconsistency in the National Roma Integration Strategies implementation. There is a lack of interest and support at the national and local level. Access to funds and to information about funding are not readily available for Roma organisations. Consultation strategies must be enhanced and monitoring must be reinforced. There is a need for authorities at the national and local level to start assuming responsibilities and also a need to develop effective implementation plans of the national Roma strategy.

According to some of our members, the **most important achievements** to build future work on are:

- The **Bulgarian Parliament's approval** of the National Roma Integration Strategy making it compulsory for all bodies and persons.
- Around 200 municipalities approved **Municipal Roma Integration Plans**

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Poor consultation with Roma.** Very few Roma organisations are consulted and are mainly based in the capital. However, there is no awareness of any consultation with Roma organisations in the countryside. Moreover, the institutional and consultative framework for Roma inclusion (National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues) does not function. It lost its legitimacy when the biggest Roma organisations left the council in 2013.

- **Lack of political will** and **anti-Roma sentiments, stereotypes and hostility** from government authorities are widely publicised and accepted. **Populist parties** are organising community attacks and make racist statements on television without any consequences.
- **Weak coordination of the national Roma strategy**, since this is mainly the responsibility of one person who is the national contact point, and who has limited power in decision-making.

The key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **New institutional and partnership framework** for implementing the National Roma Integration Strategy is needed. The framework should empower Roma civil society to take real part in the decision-making process as well as to ensure real coordination among the institutions.
- **More efforts are needed** in order to effectively implement the National Roma Integration Strategy.
- **Negative attitudes about Roma** have to be tackled through a wide public awareness raising campaign.

The key **national/local priorities for a post-2020 national strategy** are:

- **Education** with emphases on secondary and university education as well as on professional qualification
- **Promotion of the Roma culture** and overcoming the processes of assimilation
- Fight **anti-Gypsyism**

3.3 Czech Republic

According to some of our members in the Czech Republic, the **most important achievements** to build future work on are:

- The adoption of a **National Roma Integration Strategy**
- The European Commission's **infringement procedure** against Czech Republic for violation of the Racial Equality Directive

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Anti-Gypsyism and discrimination** against Roma is rising as many Roma still face discrimination in access to schools, housing and health services.
- **Lack of political will** from some local authorities to take social inclusion measures
- The National Roma Integration Strategy is still a dead policy and **not properly implemented**

The key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Active participation of Roma** in the policy-making process since they are not properly consulted
- **Allocation of adequate funds** for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and other Roma related policies
- Better monitoring of the implementation of the **Racial Equality Directive** in other fields other than education
- Concrete measures from the EU to **counter racism** in general and racist attitudes of officials and institution in particular

The key **national/local priority and action for a post-2020 national strategy** is:

- The adoption of a local Roma strategy by the different regions in the Czech Republic

3.4 France

In France, according to some of our members, there is a lack of a national approach to Roma inclusion. Moreover, the national context is characterised by the government's violation of Roma's human rights through the ongoing evictions of Roma families without the provision of alternate decent housing, unequal access to education and basic services, such as healthcare. Other issues of concern include the non-allocation of EU funds for Roma inclusion and the refusal of national, regional and local authorities to consult grassroots Roma organisations.

According to some of our members in France, the **most important achievement** to build future work on is:

- The engagement of entirely self-funded local organizations facilitating the socio-economic inclusion of Roma families and communities in France.

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Lack of recognition and support of grassroots organisations by the local and national government.** Consequently, these organisations dedicated to guarantee Roma's fundamental rights and access to basic services and structures are entirely self-funded.
- **Lack of participation of Roma and civil society.** The government does not promote any form of dialogue with grassroots organisations or members of the Roma community to discuss any relevant policy matters relating to Roma inclusion.
- The **structural rights violations of Roma** by hinder their access to basic services and amenities such as housing, education and medical services which the elected government officials perpetuate and openly espouse on local, regional and national levels.

The key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Government dialogue with grassroots organisations.** Grassroots organisations in France are vital and effective entities in ensuring the inclusion of Roma at the national and local levels and thus, should be properly consulted.
- **Allocation of financial support for grassroots organisations.** Local, regional and national government financial support should be allocated to support the work of grassroots organisations working on Roma inclusion. The European Structural Funds could be used to achieve this, since they are being underused for Roma inclusion initiatives.
- **Hate speech.** Initiatives at the local, regional and national levels are needed in order to raise awareness about the Roma among the general population. Moreover, strong measures to tackle hate speech need to be put into place.

The key **national/local priorities and acts for a post-2020 national strategy** are:

- **Political representation of Roma.** Roma, in particular the youth, should be represented in politics, especially at the governmental level.
- **Violence and discrimination of Roma.** Effective measures should be put in place to end prejudice, discrimination and structural violence against Roma which can be reinforced by the European Commission and European Court of Human Rights.
- **Equal treatment of Roma.** Roma's rights and equal access to services, amenities, employment and education need to be guaranteed.

3.5 Germany

According to a member in Germany, the **most important achievements** to build future work on are:

- Some of the big and key cities in Germany have adopted a local Roma strategy in addition to the national strategy.

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- Bodies responsible for the implementation of the national strategy **focus only on the local Roma and Sinti** and not on the Roma from Central Eastern Europe who live in the country for over 25 years.
- **Weak involvement** of Roma organisations from new members states in the consultation process.
- **Lack of funding** of Roma organisations from new member states that tend to focus on employment, education, housing and discrimination.

3.6 Greece

According to some of our members in Greece, there is a general agreement that Roma are not properly consulted by officials when it comes to the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy.

According to one of our Greek member, the **key challenges** that still need to be addressed are:

- The **non-inclusion of the largest Greek Roma settlement in the urban development plan**. The largest Roma settlement in Greece, Drosero, is not included in the urban development plan which can create difficulties to develop policies or initiatives for Roma inclusion. Despite the fact that local authorities are aware of this issue, they do not take any action to solve it.
- High levels of **illiteracy** and **low education** of Roma in Greece should be tackled through sponsored or funded educational programs aiming to increase Roma's access to education, work, and information.

According to our Greek member, the key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Right to education** to all Roma children should be guaranteed.
- **Right to work** should be ensured to all Roma.
- **Empowerment** of Roma by raising awareness of their rights and duties.

According to our Greek member, the key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Data collection**. In cooperation with universities and local Roma associations, perform a population census in Roma settlements to collect in-depth data concerning Roma's living conditions.
- Inform Roma about their **rights and obligations** as citizens.
- **Promote Roma political participation** through capacity building activities on how they can exercise their right to vote or be politically engaged. Roma youth and women should be also targeted.

3.7 Italy

According to some of our members in Italy, the **most important achievements** to build future work on are:

- The inclusion of the Roma issue on the government's agenda
- The aggregation of associations that were disconnected from each other
- The start of reflecting and discussing issues relating to statelessness

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Lack of an independent monitoring body of human rights at the national level.** The national anti-discrimination office (UNAR), appointed as the National Roma Contact Point in Italy, currently lacks independence from the government. The structural reform of UNAR is needed in order to establish an independent monitoring body of human rights at the national level and to ensure UNAR's governance stability.
- The practice of **forced evictions**, without providing suitable and alternative housing solutions continues in non-compliance with international standards and no effective solutions have been implemented even though the Italian National Roma Integration Strategy prioritises ending segregated Roma camps. Guidelines on evictions in line with international standards should be adopted. Moreover, an effective and integrated national plan to end segregated Roma camps and racially segregated shelters should be developed. The plan should include the provision of adequate housing solutions and the allocation of funds to projects aiming to achieve such aims.
- **Discrimination of Roma**, especially in the educational system, needs to be addressed and already available policies modified. Direct collaboration with the Ministry of Education could facilitate the much needed effective measures to end school discrimination, as well as tackling high dropout rates and low school enrolment affecting Roma children living in precarious housing.

According to some of our members, the key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Racially segregated shelters and settlements.** All shelters should be integrated as a way to end all segregated Roma camps. Funds should be allocated to projects and initiatives aiming for integrated housing settings and inclusion paths of families. The transfer of families on ethnic basis in sub-standard, inadequate and segregating housing must be stopped.
- **Forced housing evictions.** The systematic practice of forced evictions of Roma without the provision of decent alternative housing as required by international human rights law must stop.
- **Hate speech.** Ensure that national anti-discrimination legislation prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment, including the incitement to racial discrimination by public authorities or institutions at both national and local levels. All private and public actors, including politicians at all levels, should be made accountable and sanctioned for propagating hate speech or hatred concerning the Roma community.

According to a member in Italy, the current political instability in Italy makes it difficult to determine key national priorities for a post-2020 national strategy.

3.8 Slovakia

According to some of our members in Slovakia, the most important achievements to build future work on are:

- The adoption of a **National Roma Integration Strategy**
- The European Commission's **infringement procedure** against Slovakia for violation of the Racial Equality Directive
- The engagement to Roma inclusion of the national government during their **EU presidency**

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Anti-Gypsyism and discrimination** against Roma is rising as many Roma still face discrimination in access to education, housing and health services
- **Lack of political will** from some local authorities to take social inclusion measures
- The National Roma Integration Strategy is still a dead policy and **not properly implemented**

The key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Active participation of Roma** in the policy-making process since they are not properly consulted
- **Allocation of adequate funds** for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and other Roma related policies
- Better monitoring of the implementation of the **Racial Equality Directive** in other fields other than education
- Concrete measures from the EU to **counter racism** in general and racist attitudes of officials and institution in particular

The key **national/local priority and action for a post-2020 national strategy** is:

- The adoption of a local Roma strategy by the different regions in Slovakia

3.9 Sweden

According to one of our members from Sweden, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- **Slow action of decision-makers** which should move from words to action and put in the needed resources.
- **Weak involvement of local Roma** in the policy-making process. Roma should be involved at every stage of the policy-making process.

- The need to **improve the human rights of Roma**.

According to our member, the key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to 2020** are:

- **Combat racism and discrimination** against Roma
- **Empowerment of Roma** by informing them about their rights and duties and by enabling them to speak for themselves.

Moreover, the key **national/local priority to be taken post-2020** is:

- The human rights of Roma

3.10 UK

According to one of our members in the UK, the National Roma Integration Strategy is not working and no improvements have been felt by most people in the community. Moreover, Brexit is seen as being an additional obstacle which will have a negative impact on the Gypsy Traveller communities in the UK.

However, some **key challenges** still need to be addressed:

- Lack of **housing/accommodation**
- **Healthcare**, including life expectancy and life quality
- **Education** for children and adults, and the **underachievement** of the community

The best way to address these challenges during implementation up to 2020 is by ensuring better consultation with the Gypsy Traveller communities, and target funding better.

According to some of our members, the key **national/local priorities and actions to be taken up to and post-2020** are:

- Lack of **housing/accommodation**
- **Healthcare**, including life expectancy and life quality
- **Education** for children and adults, and the **underachievement** of the community

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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.