“From words to practice: acting for Roma equality and integration”

The main goal of the project is to foster the social inclusion and equal treatment of Roma in Europe.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- Advocate to improve the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) implementation according to the Commission’s progress reports and recommendations and promote its transposition at national and local level – through roundtables with local authorities, advocacy actions, and lobbying national/local authorities to implement the Commission’s Council Recommendation;

- Promote the effective implementation of anti-discrimination legislation – through lobbying to ensure effective implementation of the Race Equality Directive (RED) and national anti-discrimination law, working with Equality Bodies (EBs) to identify and overcome challenges in addressing discrimination, and ensure constant cooperation of Roma with Equality Bodies;

- Promote the active equal participation of Roma representatives, especially the young and women, in the NRIS implementation and other anti-discrimination policies and in the fight against discrimination – through advocacy, a template letter for Roma to advocate for the Council Recommendation and the NRIS implementation, a handbook for Roma activists, training Roma (particularly the young and women) in how to assist national, local and regional authorities to implement the NRIS and anti-discrimination policies, raising awareness of the need of Roma active participation, and facilitating the involvement of ERIO’s network and Roma activists in advocacy actions;

- Raise awareness about the needs and concerns of Roma and the existence of the appropriate tools to address these issues – through raising awareness of existing EU and national anti-discrimination legislation and policies and encouraging Roma victims of discrimination to file complaints with relevant bodies.

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 network, it aims to combat racism and exclusion of Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development. ERIO has been actively involved in shaping European policies for Roma inclusion. ERIO is among key stakeholders being regularly consulted by the European Commission when addressing Roma-related issues. In light of recent main EU policy developments, ERIO has become all the more a strategic partner for the EU institutions in assuring the monitoring of their implementation and in advising for further improvement.

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ERIO Av. Edouard Lacomblé 17 Brussels 1040, Belgium
Tel: 0032(0)2733 34 62 Email: office@erionet.eu Website: www.erionet.eu Facebook: facebook.com/erionet.eu Twitter: twitter.com/ERIO_EU

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1. Innovative character

The project’s main innovation is that it:

• ensures greater Roma involvement in processes dealing with their inclusion and anti-discrimination;

• promotes the NRIS transposition at national and local level and starts a lobbying with local authorities;

• will trigger a genuine and productive cooperation between EBs and Roma civil society;

• for the first time, activists at local level, and not only at EU and national level, will be involved in a campaign to raise awareness about the NRIS implementation and Council Recommendation;

• includes an advocacy handbook for Roma to advocate at European, national and local level. This will be a powerful tool in the promotion of Roma participation and empowerment;

• includes papers on the NRIS and RED implementation that are innovative since they will provide updated information on challenges and solutions that could be applied across Europe and in different working fields.

2. Project beneficiaries and expected results

The expected number of beneficiaries will include: Roma, particularly the young and women and European society as a whole – i.e. EU institutions, national, local and regional authorities, Equality Bodies, civil society, journalists, professionals working with/for Roma (e.g. teachers, social workers) and the general population.

With this project, we expect the following results:

• More effective implementation of the NRIS;

• An increased number of regional and local authorities who transpose the NRIS;

• An increased number of Roma who are more skilled and knowledgeable to participate in the NRIS implementation;

• Increased understanding and awareness about anti-discrimination and Roma related initiatives at both the EU and national level;

• Increased ethno-cultural sensitivity amongst different stakeholders involved in processes related to Roma integration;

• Significant outreach through media entities and ERIO’s information program about Roma related issues.
3. Project outputs and deliverables

**Project main outputs are:**

- Mission trips to meet with national / local authorities aimed at ensuring the NRIS transposition, the implementation of the Council Recommendation and the participation of Roma;

- Community meetings to identify the needs of and realities for Roma;

- Roundtables with local/regional authorities;

- Advocacy training for Roma to be involved in the implementation of the NRIS as well as in anti-discrimination and social exclusion policies at European, national and local level;

- Workshop with Equality Bodies and Roma representatives to exchange ideas, views, concerns and inform each other about barriers they face.

**Project main deliverables are:**

- Template letter for Roma activists to pressure national and local authorities to implement the NRIS, adopt and implement the EC Council Recommendation, and involve Roma;

- Advocacy handbook for Roma activists on how to advocate at European, national and local level. The manual will provide a step-by-step guide to redesigning effective advocacy actions;

- Paper "Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies: challenges and solutions for local authorities";

- Paper "Implementing the Race Equality Directive: challenges and solutions for Equality Bodies";

- 4 newsletters;

- Factsheet about the European Year 2014 for reconciling work and family life and the close link to the situation of Roma women and the situation of Roma women.
ERIO’s recommendations to the Greek EU Presidency

In the context of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, ERIO, as an advocate for the rights of the Roma, contributed to the current Presidency’s work by presenting its recommendations to the Greek Presidency at the beginning of the current year aiming to improve the Roma situation across Europe.

ERIO has taken note of the fact that some important progress has been made towards Roma inclusion with the adoption of the Council Recommendation proposed by the European Commission; however, Roma still face discrimination and their rights are systematically violated. As 2014 is a key moment for defining the future course for developing the area of freedom, security and justice in the EU, the Greek Presidency should ensure that human rights and equality remain the founding values of the Union.

The outlined recommendations address the following topics of concern for the Roma population:

National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS)

Despite member states’ commitment to ensure equality and improve the socio-economic situation of Roma by delivering their National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), there is a slow progress on the ground. This needs to be reverted by ensuring an effective implementation of the NRIS at local level. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Greek Presidency to:

• Support and pressure member states to implement the adopted Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states. The effectiveness of this implementation is enhanced with the active participation of Roma at every stage of the process.

Fighting rising discrimination against Roma and racism

The current rise in racism, xenophobia and right-wing extremist movements across Europe is deeply worrying. Roma encounter these phenomena on a daily basis. ERIO is pleased to see that the Greek Presidency plans to continue discussions on racism and xenophobia. In order to stop all forms of racial and ethnic racism and hatred, ERIO calls on the Greek Presidency to:

• Urge member states to strongly condemn, penalise and oppose all forms of anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech by politicians and public officials. Anti-Roma discourses stigmatise Roma and may serve to incite acts of racially motivated violence. The implementation of the Race Equality Directive should be guaranteed.

• Ensure that the post-Stockholm strategic guidelines and priorities for the future Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) programme in the area of freedom, security and justice after 2014 includes discrimination against Roma.

Promoting an inclusive economic growth with a social dimension

While it is appropriate to focus on growth and job creation as a driving force for a way out of the current economic crisis, this should be pursued in an inclusive way by tackling the most vulnerable, such as the Roma who are in a clear disadvantage due to their lack of formal education and discrimination. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Greek Presidency to:
• Promote a racism-free labour market with quality jobs where the rights of workers are protected and equality is ensured. Urge member states to encourage employers to include Diversity Management at the workplace.

Migration and mobility

Migration and mobility rights usually do not equally apply to Roma as to mainstream society. The fundamental EU right to free movement is not always granted to all EU citizens, particularly to the Roma, who often face violation of rights and discrimination. Roma who are EU citizens or residents should have the same rights to mobility and free movement as others. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Greek Presidency to:

• Ensure that member states respect and implement the Free Movement Directive 2004/38/EC in order to guarantee that Roma and all EU citizens exercise their right to free movement on an equal basis and to prevent future deportations and expulsions of these communities by member states.

• Urge member states to restrain from and condemn political and public discriminatory and stigmatising discourses about Roma migration following the lifting of restrictions on the free movement of workers from Bulgaria and Romania. Freedom of movement, like migration, should be seen as a benefit to European societies.

Enlargement

A large Roma population lives in the candidate countries where they face extreme social exclusion, human rights violations and widespread poverty. Decent living conditions of these communities as well as the protection of their fundamental rights need to be guaranteed. To achieve this, ERIO calls on the Greek Presidency to:

• Ensure that Roma inclusion remains an ‘acquis communautaire’ during the ongoing accession negotiations. The Presidency should make sure that Turkey’s accession reforms show a clear improvement of the living conditions of Roma’s residing in that country.

Read the full recommendations here: www.erionet.eu/doc-recommendations_greek_presidency_2014
ERIO’s Fact Sheet “Roma women and reconciliation of work and family life” photo Roma woman

Following the designation of 2014 as the European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life, ERIO has developed a fact sheet on the situation of Roma women who constantly have to juggle between work and family responsibilities, aiming in this way to raise awareness of the multiple discriminations faced by Roma women.

In the context of balancing work and family life, Roma women are a particularly vulnerable group, as they encounter other challenging factors that put them in a disadvantaged position, such as limited access to education and training or discrimination when looking for employment, which makes it particularly difficult for them to work and take care of the household.

The European Year 2014 campaign is intended to open discussion about existing legislation in the area of social and labour market policies, while at the same time identifying and disseminating good practices on family and work life reconciliation in the different EU member states. Over the year, the problem of poverty as well as possible means to improve social integration and provide quality employment (through care services, satisfactory salaries, job security and working conditions which are family friendly) will be tackled.

ERIO emphasizes in its fact sheet that for Roma, family and children are the most important aspect of their lives and that the traditional Roma family model together with early marriages strongly affect girls’ and women’s education as well as their further options for undertaking professional activities. Thus, one of the most common problems limiting Roma women’s participation in the labour market is their low level of formal education, often limited to primary education. At the same time, research findings show that Roma women are also more likely to be informally employed compared to Roma men and this might considerably account for lower wages that they receive compared to the rest of the population.

In this context, ERIO recognizes the relevance of the EY2014 program and its objectives for European Roma women, and underlines the increased need to advocate for an integrated approach that could help Roma women to balance work and family life.

Therefore, ERIO has adopted in its fact sheet a series of recommendations for improving the situation of Roma women, among others placing focus on the gender dimension and actions targeting Roma women and girls when implementing National Roma Integration Strategies at the local level, ensuring the participation of Roma women at all levels of decision-making or adopting a comprehensive approach to ensure that they achieve equal opportunities within the EU.

ERIO’s Call “Support the human rights of all in the EU, including those of the Roma”

ERIO’s call for action on the protection of human rights of all EU citizens, including those of the Roma by the European Parliament and the European Commission aims to draw attention to the issues that concern the largest ethnic minority in the continent that is the Roma.

The current European Parliament and European Commission are called upon to commit to the protection of the right to security and life of Roma during and after the European elections as many politicians have a tendency to play the ethnic card as a strategy to gain votes by using anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech. This fuels violent assaults and racially motivated violence against Roma causing the death of many, while at the same time threatening the EU’s founding principles. Thus, ERIO takes this new opportunity to strongly condemn and oppose racist rhetoric in all its forms.

Moreover, ERIO points out that the future European Parliament and European Commission are asked to keep the inclusion and equal treatment of Roma on the EU policy and political agenda given that the Roma-related work done so far by both the EC and EP should be followed up by the new elected officials at the same or higher level, to ensure an effective implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. In addition, the EC should continue supporting and pressuring member states to implement the adopted Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states as the active participation of Roma at every stage of the process should be assured.

Furthermore, they should commit to ensure appropriate budget allocation for Roma inclusion, make sure member states allocate sufficient funds for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and to meet the EU 2020 Strategy social targets, as well as to promote a racism free Europe and take the lead in the fight a-

The EC and the EP should also pledge to encourage an inclusive Europe since the focus on growth as a driving force for a way out of the current economic crisis should be promoted with a social dimension as a way to tackle the most vulnerable, such as the Roma.

Read more here: www.erionet.eu/doc-erio-call-current-future-ec-and-ep_030414
ERIO is launching a local-level campaign on Roma inclusion

ERIO has recently launched its campaign on Roma inclusion at the local level, which is part of a broader project named “From words to practice: acting for Roma equality and integration”, aiming at fostering the social inclusion and equal treatment of Roma in Europe.

As part of this campaign, ERIO will work in close cooperation with its network members from over 20 EU member states, as well as from candidate and potential candidate countries. Crucial partners will also include Equality Bodies and local authorities for the institutional side, as well as media, social workers and others for the civil society.

Our campaign at the local level will be mainly done through:

a) Mission trips to meet with national and local authorities and lobby for the effective transposition of the NRIS and the implementation of the Council Recommendation at national, local and regional level. They will be the occasion to cooperate with and involve Roma in that process.

b) Community meetings with ERIO’s network members and local Roma communities to identify their needs and to find out what is happening on the ground. This information will be useful to share with the EC for their national progress reports on the implementation of the NRIS.

Mission trips and community meetings will be done in Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany and Belgium.

c) Roundtables at the national level with local/ regional authorities and professionals. Within the framework of the NRIS and the RED, these roundtables aim to:

1) advocate at national level with local and regional authorities for the NRIS and RED implementation;
2) gather different views of local/regional authorities on the NRIS and RED;
3) identify challenges faced by local/regional authorities in the NRIS and RED implementation and possible solutions to overcome them;
4) discuss anti-discrimination issues and how anti-discrimination legislation is implemented;
5) cultural sensitise professionals, including local authorities working with/for Roma. Roundtables will be organised in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal, France, and Italy.

ERIO’s advocacy templates for national and local authorities

As part of our advocacy activities, we have prepared template letters for Roma activists, our network members and advocacy trainees to use in order to address national and local authorities to pressure them to effectively transpose the National Roma Integration Strategies at national, local and regional level in cooperation with Roma representatives and to implement the EC Council Recommendations.

You can download the templates here:
www.erionet.eu/from-words-to-practice_template-letters