Editorial: The High Level Roma Summit

On April 4th a high level conference on Roma took place in Brussels. More than 500 delegates from all around Europe attended the main event of the year. The European Roma Summit was organized by the European Commission to discuss the progress made so far on the Roma integration policies as European and national level.

The European Commission President José Barroso opened the summit stating that today the main focus will be on helping the Romani minority integrate at local level and that this will only be possible through long-term efforts. The EC representatives reminded those attending the summit that there are EUR 80 billion available for 2014-2020 in the European Social Fund and that at least one-fifth of that amount must be used for the fight against poverty and social exclusion. However, there is reportedly not just a need for money, but for the thorough implementation of EU policy in this area. “Bringing this plan to life is key,” Barroso said.

The most frequent question among participants was what is next? Will the next European Commission keep the Roma issue high in the political agenda of the Union or will it not consider it as a priority? In case there is available money in the next financial period of the EU, will this money be in the hands of politicians willing to help Roma or will it be used for something else as was the case until now. Will how much Roma are involved in their own integration continue being controlled only by authorities and institutions having access to the structural funds?
ERIO at the Roma Summit

The third European Roma Summit took place in Brussels on 4th April. Four years after the second high level conference on Roma, this third meeting took stock of the progress made thereafter and focused on the role of regional and local authorities in the Roma inclusion process. The Summit gathered high level representatives from the European Commission and the national governments, as well as local mayors from all around Europe and key representatives from the civil society. ERIO representatives also attended the Summit. Speakers were divided in three thematic panels, respectively focusing on the effectiveness of Roma inclusion policies, on their funding and on enlargement countries, the leitmotif for each of them being the local level.

Read the summary report here: http://www.erionet.eu/blog/2014/04/10/erio-at-the-3rd-european-roma-summit-2014

ERPC public statement on the EC Communication reporting on the implementation of the EU Framework for NRIS and on the EU Summit

ERIO is a member of the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) which issued a statement welcoming the European Commission’s Communication on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration as the first report examining the impact of European Union (EU) Member States’ policy measures to foster the inclusion of Roma into their societies.

The ERPC agrees with the Commission that, regrettably, little tangible and sustainable impact has so far been achieved. Member States must demonstrate political will and determination to end discrimination and foster inclusion.

There is no and must not be place in the EU for discrimination. Member States must consistently meet their commitments and obligations to combat discrimination and ensure Roma inclusion.

We therefore turn towards the leaders of the EU and its Member States, who will come together at the European Roma summit, to demonstrate their consolidated political will to end discrimination; and to finally take effective actions to ensure inclusion.

You can read the full statement here: http://www.erionet.eu/doc-erpc-press-statement-04-04-14-final
The Roma and Sinti communities face widespread racial discrimination and exclusion across Europe. The situation for older Roma is even worse and their difficulties and needs are too often overlooked by decision makers, causing many of them to continue living in deprived conditions, at the margins of both mainstream society and of Roma communities.

Previous research on older Roma undertaken by AGE and ERIO has shown that despite the growing interest at EU level in tackling the exclusion and discrimination faced by Roma with the adoption in 2011 of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, older Roma remained a much neglected group in this political discourse. In 2013, the Council of the European Union adopted the first EU legal instrument in the field of anti-Roma discrimination in the form of recommendations addressed to Member States to assure an effective Roma inclusion. Moreover, in February 2014, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a most welcomed recommendation to national governments aiming at assuring the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons and stressing the need to address issues of multiple discrimination for the most vulnerable groups of older people.

On the occasion of the International Roma Day, ERIO and AGE seize the momentum offered by these political developments and join efforts to guide Roma integration policies so that the issue of older Roma is not left out of the equation. This statement thus sheds a light on the intersection of old age and Roma origin addressing crucial fields of discrimination and proposing ways to refocus the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Roma integration from the perspective of ageing.

In our joint statement, we propose specific recommendations on anti-discrimination, access to quality education, access to employment, access to healthcare, access to decent housing, poverty reduction, empowerment and active participation.

Conclusions

Remarkable progress has been made in recent years towards a greater inclusion of both Roma and older people within European societies. These developments are best exemplified on the one hand by the EU Council Recommendation on enhancing effective Roma integration measures in the Member States and on the other hand by the Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of human rights of older persons. Still, an integrated life-course approach towards older Roma continues to be largely absent in those policy developments. In acknowledging the importance of the aforementioned European instruments, we must nonetheless underline the lack of a mainstreamed ageing dimension focused on older Roma within European and national-level policies. Anti-discrimination policies should take into account the situation of such a vulnerable group, often subject to multiple discrimination practices on the grounds of their ethnicity and age.

Indeed, as a number of researches show, older Roma still experience a high degree of discrimination in all social fields, namely education, employment, health care and housing. In order to tackle these challenges, this paper presented a set of policy recommendations to the European and national authorities that have to be contextualised within broader structural conditions, namely the fight against poverty and the empowerment of older Roma. Only a true life-course approach in designing, implementing and monitoring inclusion policies can result in an effective integration and improvement of the living conditions of older Roma.

Read the full statement here: http://tinyurl.com/nr6t3aq

4 https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2162283&
ERIO asked two of its young team members to share their views. Here are their five key reasons for going to the polls on 22-25 May:

- Expressing our support for DEMOCRACY and RULE OF LAW in Europe, as two of the fundamental values of the EU.

- MAKING OUR VOICE HEARD to influence the future EU political landscape and defend our interests as EU citizens.

- Re-affirming our right to FREE MOVEMENT and ensuring that all EU citizens fully enjoy it, particularly the Roma.

- Supporting a better REPRESENTATION OF ALL MINORITIES, be them women, LGBT, Roma and other ethnic groups, within the European Parliament.

- Offering an opportunity for and building alliances with minority groups, including Roma, to put forward and better advocate for a more tolerant, diverse and INCLUSIVE EUROPE.

ERIO’s statement: Time to act and counteract the alarming rise of far-right and neo-Nazi parties in the European Parliament

In the aftermath of the European elections, exit polls are now becoming real scores. These watershed elections have brought about a deep shock in many parts of Europe, with Eurosceptic, far-right and neo-Nazi parties rising throughout the continent.

The European Roma Information Office, as an organisation defending the rights of the Roma minority and promoting its full inclusion in Europe, is deeply concerned over the current political landscape marked by dangerous trends towards intolerant, xenophobic and racist attitudes.

Examples are, alas, numerous. Hungarian neo-Nazi movement Jobbik settled for second place with roughly 15% of the votes, whilst its Greek counterpart Golden Dawn is the third party with almost 10%. Perhaps even more worrying news come from long-established democracies, if even in Sweden far-right party Swedish Democrats got two seats within the European Parliament (around 10%).

In several countries far-right parties were the most-voted, such as the Danish People's Party in Denmark (26,6%). Most notably, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) has ranked at the top of UK votes, with over 27%, and in one founding state of the Union, France, Marine Le Pen’s Front National topped the polls with nearly 25%. “Minority rights, such as those of Roma, are currently at risk in many countries. At the EU level, this could entail heavy consequences for inclusion policies addressed to Roma, hence jeopardising the little progress hardly achieved so far” denounced ERIO’s Executive Director, Ivan Ivanov. “Far-right and neo-Nazi movements are long known for their aggressive policies towards everyone who is different from their self-referential identity” he continued. “Eurosceptics, craving to re-nationalise crucial policies, endanger the rights of Roma too, mainly denying their right to free movement and settlement in the Union as EU citizens”, Mr Ivanov said.
Economic and political crises have certainly contributed to foster the fears of the European peoples. But fear is no solid ground on which to build the future of our societies. We therefore call all parties and MEPs sharing the ideal of a united and inclusive Europe to overcome their differences and stand up against this frontal attack to the fundamental values of our Union and ensure a racism free Europe.

You can download the pdf of this statement here: http://www.erionet.eu/doc-statement_eu-elections-2014_270514

ERIO at the EESC public hearing on Roma inclusion

On 12 May, the European Economic Social Committee (EESC) organised a public hearing “Better Roma inclusion through civil society initiatives” in Brussels. ERIO was invited to speak about Roma and anti-discrimination.

ERIO’s policy officer, Marta Pinto, raised the alarm over the increasing anti-Roma sentiments and anti-Gypsyism, and persistent patterns of violent attacks and actions against this group. Of particular concern, she noted, is the increase of paramilitary and militia groups and extreme right-wing organisations targeting and terrorising Roma and using anti-Roma rhetoric. She called on both the European Commission and member states to take a strong position against right-wing extremism and incitement to hatred in order to protect Roma’s right to security and life.

She stressed the need for all actors to work together to overcome challenges in the implementation of the Race Equality Directive (RED) which has not been fully enforced by some countries. Partners such as Equality Bodies can play a key role in tackling anti-Roma discrimination, she concluded.


ERIO met with Portuguese representatives of local authorities

On 2 June, ERIO’s policy officer, Marta Pinto, met with representatives of local authorities from 3 different cities (Paredes, Santo Tirso and Barcelos) in Porto, Portugal. The meeting was hosted by EAPN Portugal.

Although all local authorities are actively engaged in Roma inclusion issues, there was a general consensus that authorities are not well informed about the Portuguese NRIS and EU Roma related policies (such as the EU Framework for NRIS) and that the implementation of the NRIS at local level is very slow. Since the elaboration of the NRIS, many local authorities have been involved in a national survey where they were consulted to provide local data to assess needs of local Roma.

One concrete strategy that has been implemented at the local level is the Program for Municipal Roma Mediators which aims at every Portuguese municipality with a significant Roma population interested in creating links and fostering dialogue between the Roma community, local authorities, and civil society organisations. Economic and political crises have certainly contributed to foster the fears of the European peoples. But fear is no solid ground on which to build the future of our societies. We therefore call all parties and MEPs sharing the ideal of a united and inclusive Europe to overcome their differences and stand up against this frontal attack to the fundamental values of our Union and ensure a racism free Europe.
ERIO met with Portuguese Roma communities

On 2 June, ERIO’s policy officer, Marta Pinto, met with local Roma from 6 cities (Paredes, Aveiro, Matosinhos, Espinho, Porto and Barcelos) in Porto, Portugal. The meeting was hosted by EAPN Portugal.

The meeting aimed to identify their needs and to find out what is happening on the ground. The issue of discrimination was highlighted as one of the main obstacles to progress in all fields in life. Roma face discrimination when trying to rent accommodation, when applying for a job and in school. Another key issue of concern raised at the meeting was housing. There has been an increase in the creation of “Roma neighbourhoods”.

An example is the Biquinha neighbourhood in Matosinhos where many Roma moved to after being expelled from other mixed neighbourhoods due to the demand of local non-Roma residents. Employment was another issue of concern. According to participants, most Roma have difficulties finding employment due to their lack of skills and discrimination they face (based on their ethnicity and accent). There is a general feeling among Roma that in order to integrate, they have to assimilate and deny their Romani culture and habits. A common message was that for integration to be successful, changes need to happen among both non-Roma and Roma. There is a need to change the attitudes and mentalities of both non-Roma (about Roma based on stereotypes) and Roma (about the tradition of early marriages).

Interview with Patrick Desbois and Huub van Baar about the Roma and Sinti Holocaust

Within the framework of our project MemoROM, we are carrying out interviews with experts / professionals to discuss key issues relating to the Roma and Sinti Holocaust. These interviews will be included in a DVD along with interviews with Roma and Sinti Holocaust survivors.

On Tuesday 17 June, we interviewed Patrick Desbois - President of Yahad-in Unum in Paris. He shared with us the main findings of his work on documenting the sites of killings of Roma during WWII.
We also discussed the importance to collect testimonies of Roma Holocaust survivors. On 25 June, we also interviewed Dr Huub van Baar, Assistant Professor of European Studies at Amsterdam University who called for the need to have a new and more inclusive narrative for Europe.

The MemoROM project aims to create an International Remembrance Network to raise awareness about the Roma and Sinti Holocaust in order to fight discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes about Roma. By rediscovering the relatively unknown history of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust, we expect to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and intercultural dialogue between Roma and non-Roma. The DVD will be available later this year.

You can visit the project website here: http://www.romasintiholocaust.eu

ERIO’s advocacy training “Learn how to fight for your rights”

On 19-20 June 2014 ERIO organized the advocacy training “Learn how to fight for your rights” in Brussels. The training was designed to assist Roma civil society activists, as well as programme planners in conducting advocacy campaigns to fight discrimination and improving their advocacy skills to advance the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies, as well as anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies at European, national and local level.

The training was developed with the view that Roma community-based advocacy needs to be better promoted, especially at the level of grassroots groups, networks, and organizations with the necessary information and advocacy skills to demand that Roma community needs and priorities need to be addressed.
The aims of the training were to:

- Capacitate Roma, especially young and women, to be involved in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) as well as in anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies at European, national and local level;
- Raise awareness on the use of media as a tool to fight discrimination;
- Inform about relevant EU developments such as the EU Framework, the NRIS and the Council recommendation in order to be exploited within advocacy activities.

Special focus was placed on the delivery of information concerning Roma rights and recent developments in European Roma policy making at EU and national level relevant to community- and national-based organizations.

Speakers included ERIO Chair Board Ronald Lucardie, ERIO Executive Director Ivan Ivanov, ERIO Policy Officer Marta Pinto, ENAR Policy Officer Julie Pascoët, Advocacy Expert Svetoslav Naoumov, and Radio Patrin Director Orhan Galjus. Presentations were followed by group discussions and exercises where participants developed recommendations on education, employment, housing and health advocacy strategies.

The training successfully managed to provide Roma organizations and networks with the necessary advocation information and skills that concern Roma, while at the same time tackling obstacles and difficulties that Roma might face when trying to make their voices heard over attempts to fight their fundamental rights violation. The advocacy training offered our team as well as our participants the opportunity to exchange experiences, and good practice examples in terms of advocacy approaches, and establish new contacts with a view to improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU. The training was very informative and beneficial to all attendees.

More information on the training, such as the report, presentations and photos can be accessed on our website: http://www.erionet.eu/event-190614