

# ERIO NEWSLETTER



European Roma Information Office

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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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## Editorial: Invest in people

By Ivan Ivanov

In November 2017, during the European Roma Platform, Věra Jourová, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, stressed that in many EU countries the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies is not a priority and Member States prefer to invest in infrastructure rather than improving education and the socio-economic status of its Roma communities.

*“I ask the responsible authorities where the Roma problems are.., and they answered “We have updated the Roma strategy”... There is too much formalism”* Ms. Jourová said.

This year, the European Commission sent messages to the European Platform underlining the lack of enthusiasm from national authorities in giving priority to Roma issues on their political agenda. Rather, with the increase of nationalistic right-wing parties, minority rights slid down the agenda.

At the meeting of the EU high

level group on combating racism and xenophobia Commissioner Jourová further emphasized: *“We evaluate the Roma strategy but we need your commitment and contribution. The budget after 2020 must be used effectively for projects. Until now some projects were successful but others have failed. We have to speak not only about rights but also about obligations and equality before the law. It is high time to change the concept. Roma should look at the new opportunities coming with the new funding period.”*

The position expressed by Commissioner Jourová gives hope to many civil society organisations that Roma strategies will continue to be a priority on the EU agenda, and the latter will not give up on its flagship role in shifting the agenda to Roma’s equal treatment and social inclusion.

ERIO, as a European level Roma network, will continue to contribute to the work of the European Commission as well as the national authorities responsible for Roma integration. ERIO will keep its critical voice when ways of implementing Roma related strategies diverge from its core principles.

## EMPN conference “Professionals, parents and children combating early marriages in Roma communities”

ERIO organized the final conference of the project Early Marriage Prevention Network (EMPN) entitled “Professionals, parents and children combating early marriages in Roma communities” that took place on November 24, 2017 in Brussels. The aims of the conference were to: generate debate on good strategies in preventing early marriages; discuss possible challenges and solutions concerning early marriages in Roma communities; and present the EMPN project and its activities.



*Livia Járóka, vice president of the European Parliament*

In his opening speech, ERIO’s executive director **Ivan Ivanov** stated “early marriage is part of the culture of poverty and traditions must be changed within the communities itself and not by external will.” **Madi Sharma**, the EESC representative, added that a little has changed for Roma communities in the past 10 years, and a girl younger than 15 gets married every day perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Moreover, she contended that Roma women are not included in the Roma policy and decision-making processes. According to her, families should be mobilized, support services provided and girls should be encouraged to finish their education. Fighting stereotypes on girl’s role/achievements and eliminating discrimination are also important in combating early marriages.

**Livia Járóka**, vice-president of the European Parliament, argued that desegregation is key and men should stand up for women. According to her, young Roma girls rush into marriage because it gives them the feeling they are somebody and they do not have any education prospects. This could be tackled by empowering Roma women, spending money more effectively and using digitalization to report abuse.

**Lavinia Banu** (European Commission, DG Justice) commented that the topic of early marriages used to be a taboo among Roma but nowadays it is being talked about and therefore, things are progressing.

The project partners mentioned the importance of child centred approach and the challenges such as legislation (age of marriage 18 but girls marry at 16), lack of value, economic and social challenges. During the panel addressing these issues, **Michaela Bauer** from UNICEF addressed the failure in implementing legislation at the national level, poverty, social exclusion and lack of reliable information programmes. UN Human Rights Officer **Claude Cahn** stated that the focus should be on the present instead of the past. He further argued that there are a deep conflicts between police, Roma and authorities hence they are not interfering. The function of a social worker (e.g. are you ok? is there food on the table?) and empowerment (e.g. do you have difficulties finding a job?) are important keys in combating early marriages. He mentioned that the UN has a funding for rescue projects that strives to bring people back to the society.

## 11th Meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion



*Ivan Ivanov, executive director of ERIO*

The European Commission organised the 11th European Platform for Roma Inclusion on the 27-28 November 2017 in Brussels at the EESC. This year’s platform focused on the topic of “Transition from education to employment”. The meeting was attended by EU officials, international organisations, Roma and non-Roma civil society, national and local authorities, academia and trade unions.

The platform started with two thematic workshops: one focusing on education aspects of transition from education to employment and the other on employment aspects of transition from education to employment. During the meeting, ERIO played an active role. Our deputy director **Marta Pinto** was a kick-off speaker at the employment workshop and our executive director **Ivan Ivanov** was rapporteur of the same workshop.

According to Commissioner **Věra Jourová**, the EU must continue to play an important role in safeguarding human dignity in times of

racism and xenophobia. She mentioned that useless policies are detrimental to everyone and EU funds for Roma inclusion should be used wisely, especially after 2020. European Parliament Vice-President **Livia Járóka** stressed the necessity of having a legal base for the future EU Framework for National Roma Strategies. MEP Soroya Post stated that training, employment and business for Roma youth should be provided as a result of engaging Member States with the private sector as for now Roma are being neglected by politicians, who should make sure that Roma have equal care and act to end discrimination against this community.

Here you can find more information about the platform and read the meeting report: [http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item\\_id=607095](http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=607095)



*Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality*

## ERIO roundtable in the Netherlands



*Roundtable in the Netherlands*

On December 11, 2017, ERIO organized a round-table in the Hague, the Netherlands. The event was attended by Roma and Sinti organisations, non-Roma civil society organisations, experts, local authorities and representatives of the Dutch government. Objectives of the meeting were to identify the main issues and challenges faced by Roma and Sinti in the NL, and to find solutions to overcome them.

Roma and Sinti have reported different administrative obstacles preventing them to obtain legal documents, and consequently have access to goods and services. In education, early school dropouts are still a concern. As for unemployment, Roma and Sinti reported that difficulties to access employment are in most cases linked to discrimination rather than professional qualification. Moreover, those who work often do so without being registered, leading to further difficulties to access the health and social systems in the NL.

ERIO was able to draw several conclusion from the contributions of its partners. Where, in most cases, discrimination reported by Roma and Sinti might be genuine, they sometimes consider as discrimination all the

problems they face such as administrative problems and access to employment and other services. However, these difficulties can also be based on specific legislation, administrative requirements and other criteria Roma cannot reach. The language barrier, the lack of legal documents including ID or residential permit is a great barrier for Roma to have equal or often any access to goods, services and employment. Regarding the reasons behind early dropouts in education, views are diverging. Authorities report that it is due to lack of motivation of children to attend school or of the families to send their children to school, whereas Roma stress the lack of income as the main reason.

Roma and Sinti's lack of awareness concerning the Dutch National Roma Integration Strategy or anti-discrimination laws in general also remains a major issue. They often do not know who to address and how to proceed in case of discrimination. To tackle these issues in the Netherlands there is a need to raise awareness about Roma and Sinti rights and equal treatment, improve knowledge on how to advocate and build capacity for participation as Roma and Sinti activists lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively participate in consultation and cooperation with responsible authorities.

ERIO and its partners recommend to the responsible authorities to create a broader, more transparent, and inclusive consultation process including key Roma and Sinti NGOs and activists in order to build trust between Roma, Sinti and institutions, and ensure sustainable integration policies and activities. To this aim, Roma and Sinti should also be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the National Integration Strategies.

Consultation should not be limited to Roma civil society and include other key stakeholders and experts such as local authorities, teachers, social workers, equality bodies, academics, media, etc. Finally, small working groups should be created to consult with responsible authorities on existing and future Roma policies.

ERIO's conclusions: In the Netherlands, there is a need to

- Raise awareness about Roma and Sinti rights and equal treatment
- Improve knowledge on how to advocate, build capacity for participation
- Establish trust between Roma, Sinti and institutions
- Ensure sustainable integration policies and activities

ERIO's recommendations to the responsible authorities:

- Create a broader and inclusive consultation including key Roma and Sinti NGOs and activists.

- Ensure more transparency of the consultation with dissemination of a short report on the topics, discussion, decisions and participants after the event.

- Demand the creation of a smaller working group of 4-5 people to consult with responsible authorities on existing and future Roma policies.

- Involve in the consultation process other key stakeholders and experts such as local authorities, teachers, social workers, equality bodies, academics, media, etc.

- Involve Roma and Sinti in the monitoring and evaluation of the National Integration Strategies.



*Roundtable in the Netherlands*

## ERIO participating at the roundtable in Slovakia



*Roundtable in Slovakia*

ERIO Board member has actively participated in the Round Table as part of the project "Promoting Active Participation and Consultation Processes in the Implementation and Monitoring of Roma Integration and Romani Youth Policies in Slovakia" in Prešov (Slovakia).

On 23 November 2017, the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic organized a round table within the framework of the project "Promoting Active Participation and



Roundtable in Slovakia

*Consultation Processes in the Implementation and Monitoring of Roma Integration and Romani Youth Policies in Slovakia*". The event aimed at preventing discrimination against Roma children in the school system.

The aim was to try to define the causes of overcrowded classes of children from marginalised Roma community into special schools and classes and to seek support measures for their inclusion in the mainstream education. ERIO Board member **Ján Hero** actively participated in the discussion with a presentation entitled "*Possible Solutions to Inclusive Approaches in Diagnosing Children from a Socially Disadvantaged Environment*".

At the round table, along with Roma activists, were mainly present school employees who meet daily with the diagnostics of Roma children and their education. From the rich discussion, it was clear that the diagnosis of children is only one of the problems of the inclusion of Roma children in mainstream schools. Everyone has agreed that it is necessary to introduce compulsory pre-school education as soon as possible.

## ERIO Advocacy Training in Rome, Italy



Advocacy training in Rome, Italy

On December 15 and 16, 2017, ERIO organized an advocacy training in Rome, Italy. The training gathered together young Roma activists from all over Italy. The aim of this training was to build capacity and skills among young people. Among the skills

taught were the ability to advocate for their rights and equal treatment; have their voice heard on matters linked to their integration; be able to defend their basic rights and participate in consultations with decision-makers on the design and implementation of policies concerning their equal access to different fields in society.

Another objective of the training was to prepare young Roma to cooperate with other civil society organizations as well as local authorities and policy makers in the design and implementation of Roma related policies and programs. Roma will therefore be able to actively participate in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) and of the

Council's recommendations.

At a local level, the training will also empower Roma in anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies. How to develop efficient advocacy strategy to communicate with the proper institutions is key in the empowerment of young Roma.

The advocacy strategy developed by ERIO unfolds in 9 key steps and advocacy principles:

- Identify the advocacy scope (European, national or local)
- Identify the issue or initiative
- Identify audience
- Target arenas of influence
- Develop key messages
- Take action
- Work with media
- Fundraising
- Evaluation of the advocacy campaign

The training also focused on the EU anti-discrimination legislation such as the

Race Equality Directive and the Framework Directive including practical tools on how to identify indirect discrimination and file complaint to the responsible bodies. A special session was dedicated to the access and management of EU funded projects.

The knowledge and skills received by ERIO network members enabled them to assist Equality bodies to register discrimination cases within the Roma communities, to assist local authorities to overcome barriers making the implementation of the NRIS less effective as well as to assist community members who are victims of discrimination to contact anti-discrimination institutions.



Advocacy training in Rome, Italy



Advocacy training in Rome, Italy



Advocacy training in Rome, Italy

## Inside view of ERIO: Kadiatou Diallo

I must admit that prior to the start of my internship at ERIO, I knew little about the daily issues Roma communities face in Europe. The only information I had about Roma was acquired during a minor Human Rights and Social Work at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. By following that course, I became familiar with the case DH and Others vs. Czech Republic whereby children were ethnically discriminated by being put into special schools that are meant for disabled children. However, I had absolutely no idea that it is among other issues, a practice faced by Roma children within many European countries. During my internship, I learned that the DH and Others vs. Czech is an extremely important case because for the first time, the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of Article 14 of the convention in relation to racial discrimination. Moreover, it has a huge impact on other discrimination cases.

I have acquired a wide range of work experience through my diverse tasks such as translation, research, reporting, monitoring, writing, attending conferences, social media etc.

Working at ERIO has given me more knowledge on Roma issues and Roma specific policies of the European Union. Now, I know the drive behind the commitment of the European Roma Information Office to advocate for Roma at both national and European level. Not only did I become familiar with ERIO's mission, purpose but I also gained in-depth information regarding the important role that ERIO embodies at the heart of the European Union. I have experienced how ERIO strives

to empower and improve Roma's access to the labour market through an entrepreneurship project. By doing research, I also gained more in-depth information about issues relating to Roma such as education and unemployment. Interning at ERIO has given me a valuable and unforgettable experience to witness how EU institutions, NGOs and representatives of states come together to discuss the problem at hand, share expertise and recommendations to improve Roma's position in European societies. Progress has been made regarding Roma policies and funds for Roma related projects are provided by the European Commission but unfortunately, they still do not live a dignified life. Thus, Roma need to be involved in policy and decision-making processes, if improvement is to happen. Overall, my experience at ERIO so far has been great and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of ERIO's team. I applaud ERIO for their amazing work and encourage them to continue their advocacy for these communities.



*Kadiatou Diallo, intern*



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