



ERIO position on the 2017 Roma Platform topic

Dear Roma team and representatives of the DG Justice,

ERIO welcomes the decision of DG Justice on the topic *“Transition from education to the labour market”* for the 2017 European Roma Platform taking place on the 27-28 November. We are happy that a previously suggested topic by us - Roma entrepreneurship - is closely linked to your chosen topic.

We believe that the *“Transition from education to the labour market”* is key for Roma’s successful social inclusion. Education is an important basic right. Roma’s access to quality education can make them competitive in the labour market. Employment is also important as it gives the possibility for Roma to improve their socio-economic status. However, the key issue is the transition from education to employment, since this is the moment when many Roma face barriers and discrimination. The issue of *“transition”* suggests that discussions should not only focus on the social inclusion of Roma, but also on the unequal treatment and discrimination faced by Roma, which are key challenges faced by this community when entering the labour market. Having in mind that *“Transition from education to employment”* involves both of the mentioned aspects, ERIO has taken it as one of its key priorities and mid-term objectives for advocacy at European and mainly at national and local level.

National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) should be aiming to achieve full and effective equality between Roma and non-Roma. The best approach towards this purpose is for member states to strengthen and to implement vigorously their NRIS and the EU equality legislation and policies.

National governments should evaluate their current Roma-related work and seek ways to eliminate any paternalistic approaches to *“mainstream”* the Roma issues, limiting the Roma as passive recipients of policy benefits. Creating short-term opportunities in parallel to the official policies and systems only creates dependency and short-term solutions. If policies would ensure effective transition from education to employment, then Roma will be able to take control of their own lives and get out of small projects and actions creating dependency. NRIS are to provide the first push for Roma’s empowerment and ensure conditions for them to take responsibilities in the formulation of further Roma related policies, as well as to assume responsibility in a broader national or European equality agenda that would benefit not only the Roma but the majority population as well. The centre of such agenda should be the transition from school to employment and counteracting discrimination and negative perceptions. All other areas considered as important for Roma inclusion are interrelated.

For more information, please contact: Tel: +32 273 33 462, E-mail: office@erionet.eu

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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In the last 12 years, ERIO has been promoting the idea that Roma's unequal treatment in Europe is linked to both social and identity aspects. Roma inclusion policies should avoid reducing the Roma issues, or its root causes, to either a purely socio-economic issue, or a purely ethno-cultural one. Policies and national strategies should combine the related goals of socio-economic inclusion and respect for the Roma identity. The fulfilment of Roma rights and equal treatment is only possible by understanding these as two sides of the same coin. We believe that the full and effective equality for Roma can be spelled out as including: access to quality education and equal access to employment and self-employment opportunities.

Another key priority for ERIO is to advocate in parallel for access to education and employment, to ensure institutions and all key stakeholders are involved in fighting discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism, which serves to obstruct the implementation of policies aimed at improving the situation of Roma. As long as racist prejudices and stereotypes pervade public opinion about Roma, measures aimed at furthering Roma equality will encounter resistance and failure. Member states should develop specific anti-racism, anti-Gypsyism campaigns designed to replace negative stereotypes about Roma with objective information. Programs related to fighting anti-Roma stereotypes should focus on treating Roma as equal in their dignity and right, rather than on counteracting the negative perceptions with folkloric approaches, urging the public to appreciate one or another aspect of Roma cultures.

So, in this sense "*Transition from education to employment*" is in line with our priorities and objectives, which confirms once again, that ERIO works in the right direction, focusing on topics and discussions that are equally important to DG Justice. As a final note, I would like to stress that ERIO will continue to contribute to the work and initiatives of DG Justice.

Best regards,

Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director

European Roma Information Office, Brussels

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