



## **Recommendations of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) to the new Members of the European Parliament**

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) recognises the efforts of the European Parliament in promoting Roma inclusion. In the previous legislative period, four resolutions addressing Roma issues were passed at the European Parliament. Nevertheless, despite these resolutions, improved anti-discrimination legislation as well as policy and investment efforts, the majority of Roma remain the most disadvantaged minority in Europe, regularly facing racism, discrimination and social exclusion. Racism and racist violence against Roma have increased considerably. Over the past years, we have witnessed more dramatic forms of anti-Gypsyism: Roma have been killed as a result of racist attacks in Hungary and in the Czech Republic. Roma are threatened by organized racist paramilitary groups. Anti-Gypsyism is being fuelled by extreme right-wing parties and parts of the tabloid press.

All this shows that a stronger commitment from the European Parliament is needed to fight discrimination, racism and social exclusion faced by Roma. Current legislation and instruments leave gaps regarding the effective protection of Roma against discrimination. Legislation and policies are not congruent with the multifaceted reality of discrimination and social exclusion faced by the Roma in all spheres of society.

The European Parliament should strengthen its commitment towards Roma inclusion by driving effective EU policies and legislation and calling upon Member States and Candidate Countries to promote equal treatment and social inclusion of Roma. We need more resolute action on behalf of the European Parliament to stop the hate crimes which the Roma are facing.

**ERIO calls upon the new Members of the European Parliament to:**

### **1. Setting up an Intergroup on Roma issues at the European Parliament**

Despite the increasing activity devoted to Roma issues at the European Parliament during the last legislative period, there is still a need to strengthen the work of the Parliament when it comes to the improvement of policies aiming at the social inclusion and equal treatment of Roma. An Intergroup on Roma issues would effectively canalise the efforts of MEPs on Roma issues, would promote synergies and enhance mutual support among them while also building alliances beyond political differences. The Intergroup would also render the work on Roma initiatives more visible within the European Parliament and to the public audience.

## **2. Promoting a European Framework Strategy on Roma**

Over the past years, a large amount of EU and national funds have been diverted to activities promoting the social inclusion of Roma. Unfortunately, this high level of investment is not reflected in reality, with no noticeable improvement being observed in the living conditions of many impoverished Roma communities. This failed investment is related to the lack of a European Framework Strategy towards Roma and to a lack of policy coordination, both within the European Commission and between European and national governments. Such a strategy should contribute towards filling the gap, in terms of policy design and implementation, between the European Commission and Member States; improve policy coordination within the European Commission and set up practical guidelines for an effective allocation of funds in programmes targeting Roma.

## **3. Passing a resolution on school desegregation of Roma children and young people and promoting the effective protection of the rights of Roma children**

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Roma children are especially at risk. Many Roma children live in slums and ghettos in substandard conditions; a higher number of them are categorized as unhealthy in comparison to children from the majority societies; over 80 per cent of Roma children in various countries, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria, face school segregation which prevents them from accessing higher education and entering into the labour market. The integration of Roma children and young people is thus one of the biggest challenges faced by the EU and national governments in guaranteeing equal opportunities to Roma.

MEPs should work for a resolution condemning school segregation of Roma and migrants, setting up guidelines for school desegregation programmes and calling upon Member States to implement them.

MEPs should monitor that Member States put in place all necessary legal and institutional mechanisms to protect children's rights, especially of the most disadvantaged, and to promote their social inclusion. MEPs should promote the adoption of a European Strategy for the Rights of the Child which would contribute to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by identifying the areas where the EU can provide an added value. Such a Strategy should include a differentiated approach to meet the particular needs of disadvantaged groups of children such as Roma children.

## **4. Fighting against racist violence and anti-Gypsyism**

Over the past years, anti-Gypsyism has risen throughout Europe. Massive racist attacks against Roma have been taking place. The rise in anti-Gypsyism does not only assume physically violent forms, but it is also spread widely through media and political discourse. The negative portrayal of Roma in the media particularly contributes towards the strengthening of prejudices against Roma, especially in times of economic crisis. This is unacceptable in European countries which are committed to defending human rights and democratic values. The European Parliament should take the lead in the fight against anti-Gypsyism, mobilising all necessary legal and institutional efforts to staunchly combat any form of anti-Gypsyism, wherever it may occur.

## **5. Promoting policies which fight social exclusion and poverty faced by Roma**

The large communities of Roma throughout Europe are living in poverty or in extreme poverty. In acute cases, urgent measures are needed. Comprehensive policies combating poverty among Roma communities should be implemented. These policies should include urgent measures which address extreme situations such as access to health care, emergency housing and micro-finance programmes. Simply combating extreme poverty among the majority of Roma and other disadvantaged groups will be a step forward towards “active inclusion” of European citizens.

MEPs should promote social inclusion policies in line with the principles of solidarity, equal treatment and full respect of fundamental rights. In this respect, Member States should be called upon to design and implement social policies towards the inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups.

## **6. Ensuring the no repatriation of Roma to Kosovo**

The current situation of Roma in Kosovo is still very precarious; besides inhumane housing conditions and poor or even no access to healthcare, education and employment, Roma are regularly the targets of racist discrimination and violence. Several Member States and Candidate Countries are planning or carrying out forced repatriations of Roma to Kosovo although there are no conditions for a safe return. These forced repatriations constitute a risk for the Roma of falling into extreme poverty and social exclusion and their health is particularly at risk. MEPs should demand of Member States and Candidate Countries to stop the repatriation of Kosovo-Roma and to guarantee the societal and institutional framework conditions for their inclusion into the host societies if they wish to stay.

## **7. Ensuring that the civil rights of Roma will be effectively protected**

The civil rights of the majority of Roma communities are not respected or not effectively protected by legislation and policies. Roma are often victims of ethnic profiling of Roma; they are over represented in judiciary systems; they do not have equal access to justice; they are limited in the exercise of their freedom of movement and many Roma lack the possession of identity documents. In most cases of racially motivated crime, justice authorities have reacted inadequately and have failed to condemn anti-Roma violence. MEPs should promote the implementation of effective measures to guarantee the security and basic civil rights of Roma people. Racial profiling should be prohibited, the over-representation of Roma in criminal justice systems should be investigated and monitored; the principle of equal treatment and the European standards for free movement of Roma should be respected; and finally, personal documents should be issued to those Roma who do not already possess them.

## **8. Promoting the development of anti-discrimination legislation**

Roma are one of the most vulnerable groups facing discrimination in the labour and housing markets, education systems, health care systems and decision making bodies. Eight years into the implementation of the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, various

countries have not implemented the Directive appropriately and National Equality Bodies do not all meet the expectations put in them. Additionally, the current anti-discrimination legislation, at both European and national levels, presents gaps which must be filled, e.g. segregation is not recognised as a form of discrimination, multiple discrimination is likewise not recognised and positive action is not considered as a compulsory provision to compensate existing inequalities. MEPs should monitor the implementation and impact of the anti-discrimination legislation at the national level and work for the further development of anti-discrimination legislation so that Roma are effectively protected against discrimination.

## **9. Promoting the inclusion policies targeting Roma migrants**

Most Roma migrants within the EU, both EU citizens and Third Country Nationals, face social exclusion, poverty and discrimination. Legal and institutional arrangements ensuring the full respect of the fundamental rights of Roma and their social inclusion should be guaranteed. MEPs should monitor that Member States' guarantee, without restriction, the right to free movement of Roma EU citizens and residents, by respecting the principle of equal treatment and applying no restrictive standards when it comes to enforcing national and European legislation on fundamental rights. MEPs should ensure that EU legislation and programmes dealing with migration are based on a human rights approach that ceases to address migration as a security issue and focuses instead on the inclusion of people with a migrant background, gives up the criminalisation of so-called irregular migrants and develops framework conditions for their regularisation.

## **10. Promoting social inclusion of Roma in Candidate Countries**

Several reports of human rights organisations and the Monitoring Reports of the European Commission on the Accession of candidate and potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey) reveal that Roma face strong patterns of social exclusion and widespread poverty in these countries. Violations of human rights, the demolishing of Roma settlements, substandard living conditions and high rates of unemployment and of school absenteeism among Roma children, are the most noticeable characteristics of the situation of Roma in the candidate countries. MEPs should encourage candidate and potential countries to establish the legal and material framework conditions for the improvement of the situation of Roma. The improvement of living conditions of Roma in the candidate and potential countries should be a requirement for achieving the accession. The agenda for the accession into the EU should be developed along with the establishment of minimal standards for the respect of minority rights.