

# How to improve financial support for Roma integration

## **Recommendations – Financial Support for Integration**

### *To National Governments*

- Specify what level of funding is needed to carry out the measures for Roma integration, proposed in their National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS).
- Indicate in the NRIS the funding available for such measures from the national budget and, through the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund, from the EU budget post 2020.
- Ensure that long term commitments to implement measures in favor of Roma integration are not jeopardized by short-term changes in political priorities;
- Ensure that civil society organizations including Roma and pro-Roma representatives from all levels are systematically consulted and included when Roma integration measures are being planned and implemented;
- Make use of quantified indicators, concrete targets should be set to close the gaps between EU benchmarks and national figures for early years services addressing Roma children.

- Consider acting together, in view of preparations for the next programming period, to seek to ensure legal certainty on the use of ESF to fund Roma Integration measures.

### *To the European Commission*

- Among others ex-ante conditionalities for providing accessible, high quality services for those who are most in need (in many cases for Roma children) should be applied. Dedicated efforts should be made to enhance the targeting of funds towards high quality services for disadvantaged Roma.
- The post 2020 EU Framework for NRISs should include indicators and target values, which deal with anti-discrimination or, more specifically, antigypsyism.
- During post 2020 programming period, these indicators shall also be taken into account in the design of measures promoting the inclusion of marginalized Roma communities within the ESIF framework, in line with the requirements of the racial equality directive 2000/43/EC.
- Make sure, when revising relevant operational programs, that measures carried out under the ESIF are of an inclusive nature and contain provisions aimed at fighting health inequalities and segregation.
- To ensure, in the next programming period or when revising the operational programs, that Roma integration objectives included in the NRISs are reflected in the ESIF framework at all operational levels, whenever applicable. In this context, it should ensure that data are collected reliably in order to allow progress to be monitored and evaluated between individual projects and at all levels of administration.
- Consider proposing changes to the ESIF legislation to ensure that, from the programs period beginning in 2021, the distribution of funds among the different Member States takes into account specific social inclusion indicators: in particular, the proportion of marginalized groups such as the Roma within the population. It shall ensure that any additional ESF funds made available to Member States as a

result of this change are earmarked for the specific purpose of supporting marginalized communities.

- Encourage Member States, in accordance with national legal frameworks and EU legislation, including existing possible derogations, to collect in a comprehensive manner statistical qualitative data on access of Roma to different services such as Roma Health
- Simplify access to EU funding opportunities under the mentioned funding schemes for small municipalities.

## **Introduction:**

Today, the Roma population is the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Estimates of the size of the community vary widely between 10 and 12 million people. Of these, around 6.2 million reside in the EU, most of them in central and eastern Member States.

## **The Multiannual Financial Framework's contribution to Roma inclusion**

In 2011 the European Commission adopted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies which focuses on four key areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing. The lead service for the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in the European Commission is the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST).

The policy contributes to the implementation of the EU Framework for Roma Integration and the National Roma Integration Strategies. More precisely, ESIF are relevant and contribute to the identified Roma integration goals of education, employment, housing and health. In order to achieve these goals, the integrated use of European social, regional and rural development funds is crucial. A wide range of measures closely related to Roma integration can be financed under the European Structural and Investment Funds programs, such as infrastructural developments in social care, healthcare, education, employment, housing, human capital investments, capacity building of local authorities, and others.

## **Cohesion Policy and Roma integration**

The greater part of EU financial support for social inclusion (where measures in favor of Roma integration were co-financed) is provided mainly through the European Social Fund (ESF), and also the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in the context of the EU's cohesion policy. Other funds are also available under specific programs subject to direct management by the Commission.

The ESF and ERDF are implemented through national and regional multiannual operational programs (OPs) prepared by the Member States and approved by the Commission. Within each OP, total available funds are broken down among the different priority axes of the OP. In the 2014 -2020 program period, the ERDF and ESF were part of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF); their overall budget was around 197 billion euros (ERDF) and 86 billion euros (ESF) for the entire period.

The proportion of these amounts channeled specifically to Roma integration initiatives is not recorded. But we can infer from Member States' planning documents that around 1.5 billion euros has been earmarked for the socioeconomic integration of marginalized communities such as Roma during the 2014 - 2020 program period. In the 2014-2020 program period, the design and criteria of funding priorities have been improved. Roma integration has been explicitly referred to in the ESIF legislation. Indeed, an investment priority makes reference to it, and Member States with CSRs related to Roma integration are obliged to devote funds to promoting it. Finally, the new results-oriented approach of the ESIF legislation introduces a monitoring framework that should eventually improve the quality of data which can be collected.

**Despite the progress which has been made, certain obstacles and dilemmas remain.**

In relation to the 2014-2020 period, a number of improvements are noted: for example, Roma integration is explicitly referred to in the European structural and investment funds (ESIF) regulation and specific funding priority has been introduced. Moreover, Member States with country-specific recommendations (CSRs) related to Roma integration are obliged to devote funds to promoting it. We consider, however, that additional efforts are required at both Commission and Member State level to make sure that these changes will result in projects better contributing to Roma integration on the ground.

For example, we acknowledge that the national strategies do not indicate what level of funding is needed to carry out the proposed measures for Roma inclusion. They also do not state the amount of money available for such measures, from the national budget and, through the ERDF and ESF, from the EU budget. Anti-discrimination and antigypsyism have not been provided enough attention. The lack of any such targets leaves scope for institutional discrimination to develop or continue unchecked; this can significantly



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undermine the effectiveness of Roma integration projects, including those co-financed from the EU budget. The need for active participation by civil society organizations, representatives of the Roma community itself, was not always taken into account in the selected Member States when NRISs were being drafted. Failing to include civil society organizations and the Roma community at every stage of the process risks undermining the effectiveness of policies and projects and while the role of NRCPs it is important it has sometimes been undermined by a mismatch of resources and responsibilities.

Many questions arise on the future of cohesion policy in general. Let's not forget that one of the Scenarios for the future of Europe would scale back EU action on public health and regional policy. However, the substantial regional disparities within the EU have considerable consequences for Roma population. Sustained investment is required for the many good initiatives that have already started and further steps to adjust funding to new challenges will be essential.