



## **Roma people in Ireland – their fight against poverty and prejudice**

With a population of about 10 to 12 million people distributed over many countries, the Roma constitutes one of Europe's largest ethnic minorities. But no matter where they live the Roma are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than most Europeans.

A survey carried out for the European Commission revealed that one-quarter of Europeans would feel uncomfortable having a Roma neighbour. And more than half the Roma questioned in a recent poll revealed that they had been discriminated against at least once in the previous year.

A Commission report from 2008 also backs-up the view that the Roma face deeply entrenched exclusion and discrimination while being exposed to high rates of poverty.

In Ireland, since the mid 1990s the numbers of Roma who have arrived in Ireland seeking asylum have risen significantly. This is consistent with the overall increase in asylum seekers to Ireland that has occurred since the mid 1990s. The first major arrival of Roma in Ireland was from Arad in North Eastern Romania in 1998. Most of this group were granted refugee status.

A precise demographic profile of the number of Roma in Ireland is not possible because data is collected on the basis of nationality, not ethnic origin. However it is estimated that there are 1,700 Roma living in Ireland. The countries of origin of Roma in Ireland are Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup>

### **Cycle of deprivation**

Discrimination in the jobs market, combined with their generally poor educational attainment and lack of skills, means that the Roma suffer high rates of unemployment.

The Roma in Ireland tend to be even more marginalized than many other asylum seeker groups because of their lack of education, low language skills and historic and systematic discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Roma in Ireland: An Initial Needs Analysis (March 2002).



In Europe, Lack of economic opportunity and low wages feeds into a cycle of deprivation for many Roma. Bad housing conditions and discrimination in the housing market also underpin Roma exclusion.

Poor health and inadequate access to health care services are also key issues that the Roma have to deal with. Research on health inequalities suggests that the life expectancy of the Roma is some 10 to 15 years lower than that of the majority population.

#### **Action for the Roma**

An inaugural EU Roma Summit took place in Brussels in 2008, which was attended by more than 500 delegates. The second Summit took place in Cordoba, Spain on 8-9 April 2010, which also celebrated International Roma Day.

An important outcome of the conclusions of Council of Europe in December 2008 was the creation of the [EU Platform for Roma inclusion](#). The platform facilitates the exchange of good practice between member states and encourages active participation by Roma groups.

The platform includes active participation by Roma groups and will exchange good practice between Member States.

The platform has developed 10 Common Basic Principles to give orientation to the EU, Member States, candidate countries and potential candidates when they design and implement policies or projects to support Roma inclusion.

The principles are as follows:

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of Community instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma

In particular, explicit but not exclusive targeting is an innovative approach. It means that when using mainstream instruments, such as the European Social Fund, the Roma should not be singled out because of their ethnicity. The targeted programme should aim at improving the living standards and



environment of the Roma as well as of all those who have to cope with similar conditions (for example, immigrants, members of other ethnic minorities, marginalised members of the majority society).

An inter-cultural approach should be taken which stresses that the Roma and society at large can learn from each other. Inter-cultural learning and skills should be promoted at the same time as tackling prejudices and stereotypes.

Aiming for the mainstream means ensuring that the overall objective of initiatives should be the participation of the Roma in mainstream education, the mainstream labour market or mainstream housing – and not the establishment of new forms of segregation.

These principles represent a legally non-binding political declaration. Nevertheless, the Member States are committed to using them when they develop initiatives for the Roma.

“In Ireland, the results of an EU wide survey have shown that only 24% of Irish people would be comfortable having a Roma person as their next door neighbour and that only 6% had Roma friends or acquaintances, so there is clearly work to do in improving the levels of integration and understanding of this community among Irish society.” Said Senator Terry Leyden.

The principles were annexed by Member State employment and social affairs ministers in June 2009 to their conclusions on Roma inclusion.

Highlighting the plight of the Roma is also a key thematic priority for the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

**For further information**

[EU and the Roma homepage](#)

[EU Roma Summit page](#)

[Commission report on the Roma \(pdf\)](#)

[European Network Against Racism – Roma newsletter](#)