

**Report**  
**European Platform for Roma Inclusion**  
**Extraordinary meeting on the national Roma integration strategies**  
**A sustainable process for Roma inclusion**  
**Brussels, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012**

**Introduction**

The Extraordinary European Platform for Roma inclusion took place on 22 March 2012 in Brussels. Its aim was to give all stakeholders an opportunity to express their views on national efforts and to pave the way for the successful implementation of national Roma integration strategies.

Members of the European Parliament, representatives of EU Member States (national contact points), various organisations and Roma civil society exchanged views on efforts made by national authorities when designing the national Roma integration strategies. Participants additionally shared their ideas on how the implementation of the strategies can be made efficient and sustainable.

The Extraordinary Platform was a one-day event with 3 panels (mixed, MEP, Member State, Civil society) working on the basis of publicly circulated questions, each followed by public debate, and a fourth panel with only the 3 rapporteurs, who summarised the key conclusions of their respective panels; these summaries also contributed to the conclusions of the meeting.

**Opening Session**

The extraordinary meeting was opened by Ms. Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Justice, Citizenship and Fundamental Rights, Ms. Lívía Jaroka, Member of the European Parliament and Ms. Karen Hækkerup, Danish Minister for Social Affairs and Integration representing the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU. In addition Mr. László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion delivered a video message.

Ms. Viviane Reding on behalf of the European Commission welcomed all participants to the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Platform for Roma inclusion. In her opening remarks Ms. Reding highlighted the adoption of the EU Framework for Roma inclusion in 2011. She thanked the Member States, the European Parliament, civil society and the international organisations for their support to the EU Framework. Ms. Reding pointed out that the Framework reflects the hard work of all stakeholders and the European Commission and stressed that Roma integration is placed and kept high on the political agenda. She further added that the EU Framework aims to bring about a change in the approach to Roma inclusion: a transition from scattered, project-based interventions to comprehensive, evidence-based strategic thinking. The new approach is also clearly linked to Europe's ambitious economic growth agenda, the Europe 2020 strategy.

Ms. Reding also indicated that drawing up the national Roma integration strategies and sets of policy measures for Roma integration was only the first step. The next step will be even more decisive: it remains to be seen how the strategies will be implemented.

She highlighted the process of the assessment of the strategies, pointing out that there is still room for improvement, in particular when it comes to securing sufficient funding for Roma inclusion and putting monitoring mechanisms in place. Fighting discrimination in education, employment, housing and health also needs to be better addressed, with a clearer focus on Roma women and children in particular, she also said.

Ms. Reding then appealed for support to civil society; support of local and regional authorities to the EU Member States and assured everyone that the European Commission is committed to helping Member States in their efforts.

In conclusion, Ms. Reding stressed that "Roma integration is now on the horizon, but there is still a long way to go. Sometimes there will be obstacles that we have to overcome. We have joined our efforts, and that makes us stronger. We are now strong enough to meet the challenges and find solutions. We have a process in place, a process which should last and deliver results. I am confident that all of us will remain fully and firmly committed to bringing Roma inclusion forward. In 2020, if not before, we will be able to see tangible differences in Roma lives."

Ms. Lívía Jaroka stressed that in the current economic and financial crisis, Member States should not lose sight of the most vulnerable groups, including the Roma. She recalled that the European Commission is expected to strictly and thoroughly evaluate the national strategies, as this first assessment will set the benchmarks for future years. Ms. Jaroka highlighted key elements of success for the strategies: sustainable funding, involvement of local authorities and Roma communities, a pragmatic approach learning from past experiences.

Ms. Karen Hækkerup congratulated all EU Member States for meeting their commitments by presenting each a national Roma integration strategy. She insisted that a good approach is key and that although implementation must take into account the specificities of each Member State, objectives must be ambitious for all.

Mr. László Andor, in his video message, highlighted the link between the implementation of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies and the wider process of Europe 2020, of which creating employment as well as fighting against poverty and social exclusion - core challenges to Roma integration - are essential components.

## **Summary of discussions in Panel 1: Putting plans to work**

*Questions addressed in the panel:*

- *How to measure that the strategies have an impact on the ground?*
- *What resources (political, financial and human) are foreseen to enable the National Contact Point to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the national strategies?*

### **Overview**

The fact that the Member States have presented their National Integration Strategies represents important progress both at the European and national levels, and was a matter of satisfaction for most of the attendants at the Platform meeting; in fact, it was confirmed that in terms of policy substantial progress has been achieved at the European level. Nevertheless, the general feeling among participants is that the strategies are not yet good enough and need substantial improvements in terms of identifying clear targets, allocation of financial resources and establishment of

appropriate mechanisms for implementation: *strategies need to be more than nice words.*

At present, we must focus on the process of implementation and it is time for *putting the strategies to work*, in order to deliver results. Strategies need improvement. In fact the adequate approach should be permanent improvement during the implementation process. In order to achieve effective and sustained improvement, several ingredients are needed: political commitment, adequate monitoring processes, economic resources and suitable institutional mechanisms.

A clear message emerging from the debate is that it is very important for the strategies in the coming years to be accountable: *we need to convince ourselves and to convince all stakeholders, especially governments, that this is the beginning of a long process.*

## **Monitoring**

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategies, adequate monitoring is needed. Effective monitoring is related to the establishment of quantitative and qualitative results. In the panel debate, it was stressed that substantial progress is needed in terms of: 1/ the identification of clear indicators; 2/ gathering suitable data and information; 3/ implementing appropriate evaluation systems.

Despite the existing difficulties manifested by several Member States in gathering information and collecting data, the debate has demonstrated that different options are possible for this purpose. In fact, each country has to find the appropriate system according to its own reality: developing poverty maps, including Roma in the national statistics, carrying out ad hoc samples, comparing data with national statistics.

It was stressed that for the monitoring process Member States may benefit from the work that the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU (FRA) is currently undertaking. This includes not only the comprehensive survey that the FRA has recently developed in several countries, but also the foreseen mapping exercise identifying existing secondary sources (data and reports), as well as the intensive qualitative research that will be done.

It was also mentioned that it is important to develop the capacity of national statistics and research bodies in addressing Roma. Most of the participants also expect the Commission to take an active role in the monitoring process in different ways; such as by assessing the strategies, developing regular progress reports, organising bilateral meetings, peer reviews, providing spaces for mutual learning, providing tools, etc.

An important step at this time would be if Member States, according to their own realities and taking into account different possible options, make progress in the establishment of monitoring systems and clarify how they will monitor their national strategies.

## **Financing**

Many participants pointed out the lack of budgets in the National Strategies and insisted on the need to clarify the economic resources Member States will deploy to finance the implementation of the strategies. In fact *it is difficult to imagine that the strategies will achieve results without an appropriate allocation of resources.*

It was also noted that it is not only a matter of allocating new extra- resources for the strategies but what is more important is to make existing resources accessible to the Roma by providing inclusive services. This implies the provision, in a flexible manner,

of education, employment, healthcare and housing services, which, while addressed to the population as a whole, are inclusive of the Roma and tackle their needs.

Together with this inclusive, mainstream approach, participants also stressed the importance of recognising specific needs and allocating specific services in a timely manner, according to existing circumstances, by following the Common Basic Principle 'explicit but not exclusive targeting'. For this purpose, funds should come from different sectors and levels.

The European Structural Funds can play a crucial role in the implementation of the National Strategies. Participants recalled the fact that Member States must take into account the conditions established in the draft regulations for the next programming period. Rendering the Structural Funds more accessible to the Roma community remains a challenge not only for the next programming period but also for the reassignment of the budget in the current programming period.

In the short term it is important that Member States identify existing resources that can be mobilised in accordance with the action lines and objectives of the National Strategies, as well as the new resources that will be allocated to achieve the proposed targets, thus ensuring a more effective use of the EU structural funds in favour of the Roma community.

### **Institutional mechanisms**

Participants recalled that Roma issues concern different public authorities at national level (in charge of education, employment, healthcare, housing...). An adequate system of horizontal cooperation is needed in order to achieve coherence between policies covering the basic priorities for Roma inclusion.

The debate focused upon the need to put in place adequate structures for the implementation of the strategies. In this sense, the role, mandate and effective power of the National Contact Point is crucial. Three necessary conditions were stressed to ensure effectiveness of the National Contact Point: 1/ adequate political capacity to lead the implementation process of the strategies; 2/ institutional capacity to ensure horizontal coordination with other departments at national level, as well as vertical coordination with regional and local levels; 3/ adequate means, economic support and resources for the development of its task.

A clear task in the coming years is to strengthen the resources, capacities, mandate and powers of the National Contact Points, in order for them to put into practice adequate institutional mechanisms for effective, results-oriented implementation.

## **Summary of discussions in Panel 2: Active Participation of Stakeholders**

*Questions addressed in the panel:*

- *How do Member States secure the commitment and involvement of regional and local authorities to the implementation of the national strategy?*
- *What could make regional and local authorities commit themselves to the implementation of the national strategies or sets of policy measures?*
- *What will be the role of civil society in the implementation of the national strategies?*

## **Overview**

The panellists and most participants welcomed and acknowledged the importance of the National Roma Integration Strategies. There was consensus in highlighting that participation at regional and local level of all stakeholders is crucial and in stressing that regional and local governments, NGOs (in particular Roma NGOs) and the Roma community are vital components that should participate in shaping and implementing national strategies. Without this level of active participation it will not be possible to have a real impact on the quality of life of Roma people. It was also stressed that during the process of developing the national strategy, partnership and participation of civil society and definition of clear roles and responsibilities for regional and local stakeholders are essential components for the future implementation. Some countries were cited as examples where the participation of civil society, including municipalities, has been taken seriously during the development of the national strategies: Spain, where Roma organisations and multi-level governments were involved; Finland, where the strategy was discussed with a high degree of openness; and Hungary where cooperation and social debate with representatives from the civil society, municipalities and Roma organisations took place. It was acknowledged that although essential, consultation, participation and partnership with all municipalities and components of the civil society are not always easy to achieve. An assessment of consultation with cities presented by a panellist showed that some countries (in particular Spain and Finland) did achieve city level participation in the development of the strategy.

## **Challenges**

Although there was strong agreement that participation and involvement of stakeholders is indispensable and an essential element of all National Roma Integration Strategies, it was also acknowledged that securing commitment and engagement at local level raises a number of challenges:

- How to involve municipalities to undertake a more active role in Roma integration;
- How to empower Roma and prepare them for more active citizenship and make their voices heard;
- The need to reinforce the human rights perspectives in the strategies;
- The need for strong commitment by all public actors to denounce all forms of discrimination;
- The need for stronger cooperation between governments and civil society;
- Convincing the general population that Roma integration is beneficial for the whole of society;
- Keep on promoting Roma integration in times of crisis and in difficult economic circumstances.

## **Opportunities**

Alongside the above-mentioned challenges, a number of opportunities and constructive examples were cited:

- The best examples of participation on the design of the national strategies made use of existing administrative structures to take effective consultation down to the local level and involve Roma people;
- Member States and regional/local authorities should be supporting each other and sharing information such as examples of good practice and successful interventions;

- Experience should be shared at city level: excellent initiatives are being carried out by the Council of Europe, through URBACT ROMA-NeT and the Eurocities network;
- Active regional and local authorities should be permanent participants in future meetings of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion;
- Evidence shows that, in order to effectively support Roma integration at the grassroots level, a successful implementation structure requires: leadership and commitment to empowerment; ownership and inclusion of Roma people at all levels; trust and respect; evaluation and follow up; know-how; and resource allocations;
- With the right type of support at the local level, those consistently labelled as problematic groups, such as the Roma communities, can become active participants. Local Leaders have to be courageous;
- Involving Roma and making sure that the Roma voice is heard in the decision making processes is an improving factor, but measures to build capacity and skills need to be designed and implemented before this is a widespread common reality;
- Trust is a crucial factor: too often local authorities do not trust Roma communities and find ways not to actively engage;
- National strategies can break the vicious cycle of exclusion, if they promote empowerment and active participation of Roma. Small success stories can break vicious negative circles and step up Roma self-confidence;
- Dialogue can be difficult but it will pay off and the results of successful dialogue must be fed back into the national strategies;
- Enlargement countries should be invited to present their strategies;
- The Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion should be more concretely observed in the national strategies.

### **Summary of discussions in Panel 3: Socio-economic aspects of Roma inclusion**

*Questions addressed in the panel:*

- *What makes Roma integration even more relevant in the context of the current economic climate?*
- *How to make sure that EU Funds are used efficiently in the implementation of the strategy?*

### **Overview**

The planned focus of the session was the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies and the crisis, as well as making better use of EU funds. The later issue was discussed in detail, but not much was said about the crisis directly. There was also discussion about the situation of Roma migrants. The session allowed for a lot of inputs from the floor, which usefully challenged some of the statements made by panel members.

## **Funding in the context of the current economic climate**

The first two presentations were by government representatives from Bulgaria and Romania. George Krastev focussed on the Bulgarian national strategy being legislatively approved so its implementation is a requirement of national and local authorities. He also discussed the importance of monitoring budgetary spend on the national Roma integration strategy and said a transparent system will be set up. Valentin Mocanau emphasised that the Romanian strategy draws upon lessons learnt from Romania's earlier Roma strategy (2003-2010). In particular, it will address shortcomings in terms of both horizontal and vertical integration of actions across authorities. He concluded that 'cooperation is the key'. He also said that the economic crisis has made Roma education and vocational training an even higher priority, and that the Romanian strategy plans to create 60,000 jobs for Roma as part of a 150,000-job creation programme.

Both representatives were challenged by civil society representatives from the floor. A representative from Bulgarian civil society pointed out that the operational part of the Bulgarian strategy – an annex - had not been approved and its status was unclear. A representative from the Romanian civil society argued that the Romanian government had not consulted properly other stakeholders and that most local authorities and Roma did not know anything about the national strategy. Mr Mocanau replied that the Romanian strategy had been published in the official gazette.

Some NGO representatives reported their main concern that EU funds have not been used effectively for Roma. Simplified procedures would allow Member States to take up unspent funds for the 2007-13 period. For the next programming period, greater focus on microregions, capacity building for civil society, more use of technical assistance and the promotion of Roma active citizenship would be an asset. It was also said that too much money is spent on experts/consultants and project management rather than directly benefiting Roma people. In addition, some civil society representatives asked for EU support to build Roma NGO capacity to help absorption of EU funds, or to write shadow reports on the work of managing authorities processing EU funds at national level.

A participant also urged the European Commission to review the national Roma integration strategies for consistency with wider Member States' policies. He urged MEPs to support the Commission's cohesion policy proposals. He also argued that social inclusion should be a priority across more funding areas, including education and employment.

The discussion also touched upon the European Regional Development Fund, which civil society representatives regretted not to have been mentioned for Roma housing projects in the strategies.

MEP Helen Flautre suggested asking the Council of Europe to advise on good stakeholder involvement. She insisted upon the need for national and local actions to be coordinated and for more emphasis put on fighting discrimination. Finally, she criticised Member States who still have restrictions on labour migration.

MEP Kinga Göncz emphasised the importance of civil society for keeping Member States to their commitments. She suggested a code of conduct in funding, so as to define stakeholder involvement (e.g. including civil society shadow reporting). She criticised the lack of mention of the European Regional Development Fund in the strategies and said there was a danger of the strategies being undermined by other policies (e.g. Hungary shortening compulsory school).

MEP Gilles Pargneaux spoke of the poor conditions Roma people experience in Lille (France) and the challenge for local authorities to work effectively with Roma migrant communities. He urged action at time of crisis as Roma represent an untapped economic resource and referred to labour market restrictions as a bad thing.

Petra Kovacs, from the 'Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma' initiative of the Open Society foundations, said that it was vital for the national Roma integration strategies to become central to national debates and in these to include Roma. She feared the crisis would reduce Roma integration as a priority. She strongly stressed the need to reform public services to ensure equal access to everyone, including the Roma. Finally, she brought out that now was the time to start planning use of EU funds for the next programming period.

Participants made the point that Roma people are ready to play their part in the national Roma integration strategies. But barriers erected by mainstream society exist.

## **Summary of closing session: Ingredients of Change – Conclusions**

### **General Remarks**

- The European Platform for Roma Inclusion provides a forum for debate and exchanges of experience of all stakeholders: national governments, EU institutions, international organisations, academia, civil society and Roma representatives.
- At the previous meeting of the Platform (17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> November 2011), following the announcements of the EU Framework on the reinforcement of the Platform, a new set-up with separate workshops for different stakeholders was agreed. This 7<sup>th</sup> Platform is considered extraordinary as it does not follow the new format and focuses on the very specific issue of the assessment of the national strategies.
- This extraordinary Platform was organised specifically with the purpose of providing an opportunity to MEPs, Roma civil society as well as to the representatives of the Member States (National Contact Points), to express their views on the national Roma integration strategies and, on a more forward looking note, to share their ideas on how the implementation of the strategies can be made efficient and sustainable.

### **Immediate steps**

- The Commission will provide a report on assessment of the national Roma integration strategies in Spring 2012.
- After the report, plans will have to be turned into reality and Member States will need to focus on the implementation of their strategies.
- The Commission expects Member States to take into consideration the issues raised in the Commission's report when they proceed with the implementation of their national strategies.
- It will be very important to involve all stakeholders, including regional and local authorities as well as Roma civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the strategies.
- The Commission will report on progress in 2013.