

Towards a post-2020 EU Roma Inclusion Strategy

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Eurodiaconia

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity**, **equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.



We bring members together to **share practices**, **impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a dynamic, Europe-wide community of social and health care organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconal service, which are committed to promoting social justice. The network represents 48 members working in 32 countries, including churches, not-for-profit welfare organisations and NGOs and has been actively involved in the promotion of Roma inclusion across Europe since 2010.

The Eurodiaconia network has very much welcomed the 2011 Commission *Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020*¹ and the following development of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) in all EU Member States. Eurodiaconia and its members consider that the EU Framework has been key to support first steps to improve Roma inclusion in several EU Member States.

As the framework is coming to an end by 2020, it is now time to take stock of the developments as regards Roma inclusion in the EU and to make some recommendations for the development of a post-2020 EU Roma Inclusion Strategy. The Commission has put forward some first reflections on such a future strategy in its 2018 *Communication Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*². Eurodiaconia members share most of the analysis presented in the evaluation report³ that has been published alongside the Communication. The following policy recommendations for a future EU Roma Inclusion Strategy are based on the input provided by Eurodiaconia member organisations working with Roma communities across the EU. They also take into account the results of the Commission Evaluation and react to the 2018 Commission Communication.

With these policy recommendations, the Eurodiaconia Network aims at providing some input to the ongoing reflections on a future EU Roma Strategy. Eurodiaconia and its members firmly believe that a follow-up strategy to the current EU Framework on NRIS is needed to continue efforts in Roma inclusion as this needs to be done on the long-term. The new strategy should include the allocation of national budgets to the implementation of NRIS, there needs to be more capacity building at national and regional levels, Roma and (pro-) Roma civil society involvement needs to be strengthened, EU mobile Roma need to be better addressed and finally there needs to be a stronger focus on antigypsyism.

¹European Commission, [Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020](#), 2011

²European Commission, [Communication Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#), 2018

³European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document Evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#), 2018

Eurodiaconia's Recommendations

1. Increased efforts are crucial to achieve Roma inclusion

Eurodiaconia members, as well as the European Commission in its Communication, have pointed out that the EU Framework for NRIS has helped increase the awareness of policy makers at EU and national level about the importance of promoting Roma inclusion at all levels. However, it has also been noted by both that in the last 7 years, since the existence of the framework, only first steps have been done and the situation of Roma has not yet significantly improved. In the four areas put forward by the strategy, progress has only been noted in the field of education and to some extent healthcare, while hardly any changes have been observed in the areas of employment and housing. Throughout these first years, it has become obvious that Roma inclusion is a process which needs constant efforts over a longer period of time and with the involvement of all concerned actors. Eurodiaconia members also stress the need to combine the mainstreaming of Roma inclusion in all policies with targeted measures to support Roma.

The initiative from the European Commission to put forward the EU framework on NRIS was considered by Eurodiaconia members as crucial incentive for national governments to address the socio-economic exclusion of Roma people more systematically. **Therefore, the Eurodiaconia network stresses the importance that the European Commission develops, together with the Member States, a comprehensive follow-up strategy going beyond 2020.**

2. Allocate adequate budgets to implement the strategy

In its Communication the European Commission mentions the problem of insufficient funding. Eurodiaconia members also stress that the lack of funding is a key obstacle to the effective implementation of NRIS. They point out to the fact, that most governments develop NRIS without allocating budgets to the implementation. Often the implementation is then the responsibility of local governments, which do not have budgets that can cover the additional work that would be needed to effectively implement the NRIS. In many countries therefore, local authorities and pro-Roma civil society have to rely on external funding, such as EU funds or cooperation funds from other European Countries, to implement the NRIS. As these funds are often project-related, this is not a long-term solution and rarely allows to achieve structural change.

Therefore, Eurodiaconia and its members urge the European Commission to include in the future EU Roma Inclusion Strategy an obligation for Member States to present a funding strategy for the implementation of their NRIS.

3. Capacity building at national and regional levels is needed for better implementation

In its Communication, the European Commission stresses the need to consolidate existing structures at national level in order to ensure impact on the long-term. In addition, the Roma Contact Point which has been established in all Member States, as well as local governments need to build more capacity on Roma inclusion. According to the European Commission, the Roma Contact Points in particular, should be strengthened to better involve stakeholders on the one side and play a stronger role in the policy making on the other hand.

These observations are echoed by Eurodiaconia members. Many of them regret not to have been involved in consultations concerning their countries' NRIS and several of them did not manage to establish a contact with their Roma Contact Point. In addition, most members observe that the implementation of NRIS at the local level depends very much on the willingness of national authorities.

Therefore, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to strengthen the role of Roma Contact Points in the next Roma Inclusion Strategy. They need to be better trained to reach out to all concerned stakeholders and be involved in policy making processes. Local authorities also need to be strengthened and supported in order to better support Roma inclusion at the local level in cooperation with local stakeholders, including the Roma community.

4. Strengthen Roma and pro-Roma civil society involvement

Although there is always room for improvement, Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations at EU level have witnessed significant progress in stakeholder consultation processes throughout the last years. This feeling is in most cases not shared by (pro-) Roma civil society organisations at the national and local level. In its Communication, the European Commission also highlights the need for more consistent involvement of Roma communities and civil society organisations. This is reflected by Eurodiaconia member organisations which report difficulties of being involved in policy processes related to Roma inclusion, in particular at national level. On local level, experiences are more mixed, as some committed local authorities have recognised the importance of involving civil society organisations.

Furthermore, Eurodiaconia members which are implementing projects to support Roma inclusion stress the need to involve local Roma communities in the design, development and implementation of inclusion projects and activities. They have experienced that the community's involvement can significantly improve the acceptance of the inclusion efforts by the community and can also ensure that the real needs are addressed.⁴

Eurodiaconia therefore calls on the European Commission to explicitly include in the next EU Roma Inclusion Strategy the involvement of Roma communities and (pro-) Roma civil society at EU, national and local level, as transversally applicable principles for NRIS and Roma inclusion projects.

5. Target specific groups

In its Communication, the European Commission has highlighted the need to better target particularly vulnerable groups among the Roma. Eurodiaconia members share this observation, as regards the need to develop a specific approach to EU mobile Roma and how to adequately include and address them in the NRIS. The situation of EU mobile Roma has not been much addressed at EU level. The Fundamental Rights

⁴ Eurodiaconia's Project Mapping [Improving Health and Housing Conditions of Roma – Good practices from Eurodiaconia members](#) shows with concrete examples how Roma involvement can be successfully carried out and that it is key for successful projects and social inclusion.

Agency (FRA) published a report in 2009⁵ on this specific group, already stressing their vulnerability and the “insurmountable barriers to formal employment” they often face in the host country. Eurodiaconia members report the same observations today and are concerned about worsening situations in some countries where laws (such as anti-begging laws) are being strengthened and discrimination is increasing. It seems that only very few Member States have included specific measures for the inclusion of EU mobile Roma in their NRIS. The strong discrimination and high barriers to access local labour markets which EU mobile Roma are experiencing make them a particularly vulnerable group. At the same time, they could provide a rich resource for local labour markets.

The Eurodiaconia network therefore calls on the European Commission to include in the next EU Roma Inclusion Strategy a requirement for Member States to include strategies and concrete measures for the inclusion of EU mobile Roma in their NRIS.

6. Formulate precise targets on antigypsyism

Eurodiaconia members consider antigypsyism as one of the key barriers to social inclusion of Roma throughout the EU and across all areas of life. The FRA also found in a recent study that antigypsyism continues undermining real progress in Roma inclusion across all aspects of life ranging from education to healthcare, including employment and housing⁶. In the current EU Framework on NRIS the fight against discrimination of Roma is an underlying principle, but there are no concrete and specific targets included that would address discrimination and antigypsyism. In its 2018 Communication, the European Commission also finds that action targeting antigypsyism was insufficient.

Fighting antigypsyism needs to be recognised as precondition for successful Roma inclusion and treated accordingly. **Eurodiaconia therefore calls on the European Commission to include in the future EU Roma Inclusion Strategy a strong focus on fighting antigypsyism in all Member States, including specific measures and targets. In addition, the key areas of education, employment, housing and healthcare, should be maintained with ambitious targets.**

⁵ Fundamental Rights Agency, [Comparative report: - The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States](#), 2009

⁶ Fundamental Rights Agency, [A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion](#), 2018

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