The 9th meeting of the EU Platform on Roma inclusion gathered over 200 participants representing different stakeholders active in the process of Roma integration ranging from civil society organisations, Member State governments (including ministers, deputy ministers, state secretaries and National Roma Contact Points), international organisations, representatives of Roma communities and local authorities, academia to EU institutions.

This year’s Platform was devoted to the following topics, which were agreed and prepared in close cooperation between the European Commission and European level umbrella Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations.

- Fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism
- Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation
- Debating the way forward for the European Platform for Roma Inclusion

The main objective of the Platform was to have a joint reflection on how to link and improve existing tools in order to see a real impact on the ground and how to enhance cooperation among all stakeholders at the European, national and local level, with a clear focus on implementation at the local level.

This year the platform was organised in interactive and participatory format to allow more participants to be part of the discussions when sharing their views and experience and also to help reduce the barriers between different stakeholders and thus to encourage all stakeholders to work together.

Two thematic participatory workshops took place on 16 March in the afternoon. The conclusions and questions arising from these workshops were tabled for the political debate next day with Ministers, deputy Ministers, Members of the European Parliament and Roma civil society representatives which followed an opening speech by Commissioner Jourová.

1. FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AND ANTI-GYPSYISM

The main conclusions coming from this workshop is that despite all the efforts at EU and national level, including antidiscrimination legislation being in place, the discrimination against Roma persists and continues. Stronger emphasis should be placed on promoting Roma equal citizenship and human rights approach when addressing the situation of Roma. Official recognition of anti-Gypsyism should be done at all levels, including the EU level.

See below the issues raised in more detail:

- The importance of official recognition of anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism targeting Roma people at all levels, including EU level, was pointed out as crucial,
- Participants defined anti-Gypsyism as a root cause of Roma marginalisation which hampers the efficiency of policies that have been put in place and which, if left unaddressed, will prevent any improvement on the ground. The inclusion of the fight against anti-Gypsyism as an integral part of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies was also raised.
• Participants emphasized the importance of addressing the situation of Roma not only through the socio-economic perspective, but also by promoting the human rights perspective and equal citizenship for Roma.

• Participants emphasized the importance of political will when fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism and the importance of ensuring Member States' accountability for their actions.

• Various forms of discrimination and circles of anti-Gypsyism manifested far beyond hate speech and violence by extremists were discussed. The hostility and indifferent behaviour from mainstream politicians, civil servants at national and local level, and journalists were also referred to.

• The participants highlighted the importance of sensitising the mainstream population, service providers, including teachers, policemen, public servants about various forms of discrimination and anti-Gypsyism (as an example of promising practice, the project supported by Germany was mentioned).

• Participants agreed that the fight against all these forms of anti-Gypsyism should start already in education. The school curriculum should include information about Roma history (including the Roma Holocaust) and culture.

• The crucial role of media in the process of fighting the stereotypes and prejudices about Roma people was also highlighted, as well as the importance of empowering Roma as actors in this process.

• The participants expressed the view that increased attention should be given to Roma youth, since they experience discrimination and are exposed to it from a very early age (already in schools).

• The importance of enforcement of antidiscrimination legislation, independence of Equality bodies from political parties and access to justice was also highlighted in the discussion.

The solutions proposed by the participants were compiled in 8 thematic clusters which reflect the issues discussed in the workshop. These are: enforcement of antidiscrimination law, education, political participation and leadership, human rights and citizenship, changing the narrative, cooperation between the relevant stakeholders, promoting Roma institutions and including Anti-gypsyism in national Roma integration strategies.

Two questions have been put forward by the participants to the panellists for the second day:

• How to ensure the political will to fight against discrimination and build the inclusive education, including Roma history and culture in school curriculum?

• What the panellists can do to ensure implementation and enforcement of antidiscrimination legislation?

2. ENHANCING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION

The discussions in this workshop centred on two key themes: On the one hand participants discussed the need to ensure close links between existing Roma specific and mainstream legal and policy frameworks. On the other hand discussions centred on the respective roles, responsibilities and accountability of stakeholders of Roma integration at the local, national and European level and on how the links between them could be enhanced with a view to implementation and tangible
impacts in the life of Roma. See below a more detailed list of issues and questions that were raised in the discussions on these two areas:

2.1. Issues on linking European legal and policy frameworks to address social exclusion and discrimination:

- There was a broad agreement that the main goal needs to be effective equality for Roma in Europe. To achieve this we need antidiscrimination and social inclusion to be addressed together and not separately.

- Participants concluded that all stakeholders need to make better use of the existing equality duties, which lie in promoting substantive equality, i.e. ensuring effective equal access for Roma to opportunities. Clear action plans on how this can be done and implemented based on similar existing positive experiences are needed in order to achieve equality.

- The existing legal and policy frameworks, and the monitoring of their implementation, including the EU Roma Framework and the EU Equality Framework within the broader framework of Europe 2020 need also to be used to their full extent. Stronger and closer links between mainstream and targeted measures are also needed.

- The code of conduct for partnership that applies for EU funds should be extended to these and other areas.

In this area two questions have been put forward by the participants to the panellists for the second day:

- How to strengthen the link between existing European structures, such as the EU Roma Framework, the Equality Framework, and Europe 2020 to ensure inclusive reform of mainstream policies and effective equal access for Roma to mainstream structures and opportunities?

- In this context how to link the National Roma Contact Point with this equality duty?

2.2. Setting up multi-stakeholder platforms of cooperation linking the local and the national actors, and establishing connections to the European level

- The workshop discussions confirmed the need for effective coordination and cooperation platforms to ensure partnership among all stakeholders with focus on implementation. This requires an open and inclusive participation, starting with a mapping of all stakeholders and their respective responsibilities and agreeing mechanisms to ensure their accountability.

- Linkages between the local and national and in turn between the national and European levels are to be ensured.

- The focus should be on local level implementation ensuring showcasing of and learning from grassroots projects and building on evidence-based policy making.

- Between the national and the European levels a two-way relationship is necessary:
  - The visibility of European tools and frameworks (such as the European semester and tools available under EU funds) should be increased at the national level, to help ensure their effective use.
  - National level information from all stakeholders should be brought to the European level to help support the monitoring of Member States’ implementation of measures under the Council Recommendation on effective Roma inclusion measures. Thematic work under the European Platform focusing on topics such as anti-Gypsyism and antidiscrimination
and the four policy areas of the EU Roma Framework could also feed the monitoring efforts.

- National platforms are to function as networks linking actors of change in each institution into permanent networks of cooperation.

In this area two questions have been put forward by the participants to the panellists for the second day:

- How can you build open and inclusive coordination and cooperation structure with a clear mapping of all relevant stakeholders, a clear responsibility for each actor and mechanisms to hold each of them accountable?

- What qualitative changes can you propose to reach this goal and to ensure consultation/coordination focuses on implementation?

The second day took place in a plenary format, chaired by director Salla Saastamoinen. Acting Director General Paraskevi Michou opened the Platform. Commissioner Jourová and Latvian Minister of Culture Ms Dace Melbārde gave keynote speeches.

The first political panel included Ministers Alice Bah Kuhnke, Jiří Dienstbier and Corinne Cahen from the Sweden, Czech Republic and Luxemburg respectively, MEP Soraya Post and Roma civil society representative Costel Bercus. They addressed the issues raised from the first workshop and the questions from the audience. Full details of the opening plenary and the political panel on fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism can be followed via web streaming, please see under "Opening + Political panel on discrimination faced by the Roma:"

http://webcasting.streamdis.eu/Mediasite/Play/a0be98ebd684c3eba0541a7218866a1fd?autoStart=false&popout=true

The second panel political panel included Minister Zoltán Balog from Hungary and deputy Ministers Zornitsa Roussinova and Codrin Scutaru from Bulgaria and Romania, as well as MEP Damian Draghici and Roma civil society representative Deyan Kolev, who addressed the issues raised from the first workshop and the questions from the audience. Full details of the political panel on multi-stakeholder cooperation can be followed via web streaming at the link below, please see under "Political panel on multi-stakeholder cooperation on Roma integration":

http://webcasting.streamdis.eu/Mediasite/Play/281c5047dh5d439f875dacfbb4baaab071d?autoStart=false&popout=true

Process-wise, the dynamic way of organising the panels with brief reactions from the speakers to the issues raised by the workshops’ rapporteurs, followed by Q&A sessions made it very interactive. Besides the topical focus of the respective panels questions on inclusive education and school segregation was raised in both discussions.

Lunch was also arranged in an interactive way that encouraging dialogue at national level (stakeholders from the same Member State having lunch together); this was well attended by all participants.

The last plenary discussion focused on the way forward regarding the future of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion. Full details of the plenary session on the way forward can be followed via web streaming at the link below, please see under "Discussion on the way forward":

http://webcasting.streamdis.eu/Mediasite/Play/281c5047dh5d439f875dacfbb4baaab071d?autoStart=false&popout=true

The closing was by Cabinet member of Commissioner Cretu, responsible for Regional development, who highlighted links between policy priorities and EU funding for the 2014-2020 period and the Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the EU who announced Roma integration to be one of the priorities to be addressed under the Slovak presidency in the second half of 2016. Full details of the closing can be followed via web streaming at the link below, please see under "Conclusions from the discussion on the way forward + Closing":

http://webcasting.streamdis.eu/Mediasite/Play/281c5047dh5d439f875dacfbb4baaab071d?autoStart=false&popout=true
The debates from both days fed the following **overall conclusions**:

- **There is wide recognition among stakeholders that discrimination and racism** against Roma are structural barriers which are in conflict with the core values of the European Union and which hamper the process of Roma integration. All agreed that promoting equal rights and opportunities for Roma is the way forward.

- It was agreed that the **fight against the increasing level of intolerance** against Roma should start already in **education** and requires inclusive reform of mainstream education systems. Education was meant in its wider concept, starting with teachers, future educators, mainstream population about who the Roma are; including the facts about Roma history (Roma Holocaust) and culture in school curriculum, promoting diversity and equality in education, educating on the forms of discrimination and anti-Gypsyism, etc.. The role of Roma civil society and Roma themselves as key actors in this process is of outmost importance.

- The need for **structured dialogue at EU level** among all stakeholders was reconfirmed. The European Platform for Roma Inclusion brings a clear added value.

- Participants agreed that it is important to build trust among stakeholders of Roma integration at **national and local levels**. To this end **national Roma platforms** should be set up with support by the Commission to bring together all stakeholders from the national, regional and local levels. As a first step, documents could be drafted in the national context defining participation and responsibilities of all those taking part in the national platform. National platforms should be understood as networks linking actors of change from various institutions in permanent dialogue and cooperation on implementation and monitoring of National Roma Integration Strategies. National Roma platforms should feed the thematic preparation of the European Platform.

- The European Platform for Roma inclusion should focus on **key thematic issues** (e.g. inclusive education, employment, antidiscrimination) and should be closely linked to the European policy cycle on monitoring NRIS by showcasing inputs by Member States and civil society to feed the assessment by the Commission of the implementation of the EU Framework and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member states.

- A reflection should take place on how to ensure **inclusive open participation** of all stakeholders in national Roma Platforms and in the European Platform and how the link between national platforms and the European platform is ensured by participants.