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Commissioner Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality  
European Commission  
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Position Paper of the Roma Youth Networks on the Post-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

Dear Commissioner,

Phiren Amenca International Network and ternYpe International Roma Youth Network, representing 35 Roma youth organizations across Europe, here emphasize the importance of prioritizing Roma youth and Roma youth issues through a dedicated chapter in the post-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRISs).

Although young Roma are entitled to enjoy the same rights and benefit from the same initiatives as any other EU citizens, in reality they are doubly disadvantaged. Young Roma face the typical challenges relating to entry into the labour market but, in addition, many lives in poverty on the margins of European societies and suffer from discrimination and prejudice driven by antigypsyism. In stark contrast to the values on which the EU is founded, an unacceptably high proportion of Roma live at risk of poverty (on average, 86 % in 2011 and 80 % in 2016). **Almost two-thirds (63 %) of young Roma aged 16-24 are neither in work nor education or training**, with the remaining one-third either in school or in employment. Although there is some variation, this is the case for more than half of young Roma across all Member States (FRA, 2018). Here the disparity between the Roma and the general population is particularly striking: the proportion of young people aged 15–24 (the age group observed by Eurostat data) who are neither in employment nor education or training does not exceed 18% in any of the surveyed Member States.¹

On the other hand, the demographic projections over the long-term reveal that the EU is ‘turning increasingly grey’ in the coming decades. The total population in the EU is projected to increase from 511 million in 2016 to 520 million in 2070, but the working age population (15-64) will decrease

¹ The current position paper expresses the views Roma and non-Roma young people, representing Roma and civil society organizations from around Europe, who were participants at the Putren le Jakha – International Youth Conference on Antigypsyism (December 9-14, 2018) in Budapest
² Transition from education to employment of young Roma in nine EU Member states, EU-MIDIS II, FRA 2018
significantly from 333 million in 2016 to 292 million in 2070 due to fertility, life expectancy and migration flow dynamics. Considering these forecasts, the demographically younger Roma population will become an increasingly larger proportion of the working age population. Overcoming Roma youth exclusion and investing in measures targeting Roma youth today is pivotal.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ROMA YOUTH?

In our everyday work, we interact with a great number of young Roma coming from all over Europe. We work with young Roma with academic backgrounds, diverse language skills and international experiences. And we also work with young Roma coming from segregated and impoverished areas, who, as participants in our activities, often leave their city or country for the first time. We recognize their challenges, needs and potentials equally. In 2016, together with a great number of young Roma and non-Roma, we worked on the Roma Youth Action Plan of the Council of Europe. There we identified the greatest challenges Roma youth face. These are:

1. high levels of discrimination (antigypsyism), which have a deep impact on self-esteem and self-confidence and lead to further stigmatization and exclusion of Roma youth and their families;
2. the high levels of poverty which Roma children and young people experience as they grow up;
3. low levels of access to high school, and even lower levels to university-level education;
4. limited access to political participation and absence from relevant decision-making bodies and processes;
5. limited or no participation in mainstream youth events and initiatives;
6. a lack of political will for mainstream youth programs that are more inclusive of Roma youth;
7. an absence of Roma youth issues from related mainstream legislation and policies at national and international level;
8. a lack of solid (or any) funding for youth activities – where exist they often exclude Roma youth organizations due to their weakness and specificities;
9. an absence of effective positive measures towards equality of opportunities;
10. a lack of disaggregated data and statistics, rendering Roma youth doubly invisible;
11. a preponderance of pilot project-based activities for Roma youth which lack strategic focus to link to sustainable policies;
12. a lack of access to essential goods and services, as well as the same opportunities as other young people;
13. the reality of growing up in segregated neighborhoods and schools, which prevents Roma youth from being part of mainstream society;

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3 The 2018 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the 28 EU Member States (2016-2070)
14. multiple forms of discrimination (including intracommunity discrimination) of particularly vulnerable groups such as women, LGBTQI+ youth, HIV-positive individuals, migrants and undocumented young people;
15. a generally negative portrayal of Roma in mainstream media, which reinforces prejudices, stereotypes and racialized attitudes;
16. a lack of information in the media, in school textbooks or other sources of educational information concerning Roma culture and the lives of young Roma;
17. significant barriers to accessing quality education, often even to education at all;
18. the widespread practice of placing disproportionate numbers of Roma children and young people in special schools for mentally disabled people;
19. low levels of education and training among Roma youth, leading to their being uncompetitive in the labor market;
20. a lack of birth certificates, identity documents and citizenship status, meaning that Roma are often invisible to the administration and are denied the possibility of exerting their rights.

WHAT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION CAN DO FOR YOUNG ROMA?

The following recommendations are not exhaustive, as the challenges faced by young Roma are complex. These recommendations are specifically towards the European Commission suggesting what Commission officials and policy makers can do to bring a positive change for young Roma.

Include “Roma youth” as a specific target group under the post-2020 EU Framework for NRISs

Including “Roma youth” as a specific target group under the NRISs will encourage the EU Member states to place a special focus on the Roma young people. This should lead Member States towards developing specific measures targeting the needs of Roma young people (16-30 years old), measures which are to be implemented and reported by the national authorities and monitored by the EU and Roma youth civil society.

Include Roma Youth Voices in the decision-making process concerning the NRISs

In order to include the voices of Roma young people in the NRISs, Roma youth leaders and organizations need to be involved in the work of institutions and governments at national and European level as well. Roma youth, and respectively Roma youth civil society, should be invited, consulted and given decision-making power in discussions concerning the post-2020 EU Framework of NRISs. They should also be
involved in the design and public discussions of the NRISs. Requiring the participation of Roma youth in this public consultation process will ensure that the Roma youth perspective is reflected in policies and young Roma are not left out.

**Include Roma Youth in National Roma Contact Points and National Roma Platforms**

Roma youth are rather missing from the structures of the current National Roma Contact Points and National Roma Platforms (the latter still need to be developed and institutionalized and this provides a room for inclusion and participation of Roma youth). Including young Roma as a driving force of and a human resource for these structures will contribute for the better reflection of Roma youth voices in the implementation and design of policies and measures.

**Recognise Antigypsyism as a main obstacle for Roma inclusion in post-2020 EU Framework**

The rise of antigypsyism across Europe remains the largest threat to Roma youth participation. Young Roma are excluded from political and social life with limited opportunities in education and employment. The lack of knowledge and general ignorance concerning antigypsyism on institutional, European and national levels contribute to maintaining and reproducing prejudice and discrimination, resulting in the significantly limited participation of young Roma in youth-related policies and in decision-making.

Recognize antigypsyism as a main obstacle for equal societies and include young Roma people in designing effective measures to combat antigypsyism.

**Call for a special focus on “Roma Youth” in mainstream policies and structures**

The Resolution for the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 acknowledges that special attention should be given to youth at risk of marginalization based on potential sources of discrimination, such as their ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, belief or political opinion. De jure, Roma are protected on the basis of their ethnic origin, but in reality, programs and legislation that are
generically oriented towards minority ethnicities do not sufficiently meet the unique needs of the Roma population. And since the Roma are not specifically mentioned in the drafting of these policies and structures, the mechanisms by which Roma youth can participate and the responsibilities of the national authorities in this matter remain unclear. Roma youth still face barriers to joining and benefiting from numerous EU structures and programs such as the Youth Guarantee, Erasmus Plus, and the European Youth Forum. Placing a special focus on “Roma youth” in such policies and structures will provide Roma youth an equal access.

Ensure that intersectional and multiple discrimination is properly addressed in the post-2020 EU Roma Framework and the NRISs

Roma women, Roma LGBTQIA+, Roma disabled people, and often Roma migrants are being multiply discriminated, by mainstream society and within Roma communities. Often these groups are the most socio-economically challenged and dependent on families and relatives who, in turn, are discriminated by mainstream society. These groups can easily become victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and social exclusion.

LMBTQIA + young people are often face rejection of their families and communities, and they are at a greater risk of violence and discrimination at home, in school, at work, or in institutional context. Many of them hide their sexual orientation or their gender identity and remain invisible to their environment and to the wider society. Their sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the Roma traditions and its expectations about gender roles and cultural confrontations, place LMBTQIA + Roma at the intersection of exclusions and discriminatory systems.

The LMBTQIA + movements often do not represent the needs of the LGBTQIA + persons belonging to ethnic minorities, and the Roma movements also do not provide representation for their LMBTQIA + members. Therefore, we consider it is important to create a professional working group within EU institutions, that can effectively represent the real needs of this community.

Acknowledging the great vulnerability of these groups, targeting them with special and complex measures and providing mechanisms to empower them and fight inequalities within and outside of Roma communities is an important challenge, which deserves to be addressed in the EU Framework for NRISs and other related EU and national mainstream policies.
Invest in Roma Youth Civil Society

Because of the many challenges that young Roma face on a daily basis, coping with socioeconomic problems and discrimination seriously decreases the possibility and freedom of young Roma to organize themselves and to be active citizens. There are almost no organizations that focus on young Roma at European and national levels. The very few Roma youth civil society organizations in existence are fully dependent on private and sporadic funding. They lack capacity and sustainability, and they do not receive specific support from the state, or from European institutions, as needed. This deprives the most disprivileged young people, the Roma youth, of the opportunity to organize themselves, to increase their knowledge and skills, to be active citizens and to benefit from European youth programs such as the Youth Guarantee or Erasmus Plus.

Providing specific measures to fund Roma youth organizations under DG Justice, DG EAC, DG EMPL, DG NEAR and national funding will make Roma youth voices heard and will contribute to Roma youth inclusion in a number of other programs, making young Roma full members of society.

PHIREN AMENCA AND ternYpe INTERNATIONAL ROMA YOUTH NETWORKS’ MEMBER AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS:

Amaro Drom, Germany
Terno Drom, Germany
Evangelische Freiwilligendienste, Germany
Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, Germany
Diakonia Valdese CSD, Italy
Roma Onlus, Italy
Visa Année Diaconale, France
La Voix des Rroms, France
Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña - FAGiC, Spain
Nakeramos, Spain
Yag Bari, Spain
Kali Yag, Spain
RGDTS Nonprofit Kft, Hungary
Diverse Youth Network, Hungary
Kethanipe, Hungary
RomNet Association, Hungary
Romano Centro, Austria
Association of Young Roma, Slovakia
Phiren Amenca is a network of Roma and non-Roma volunteers and voluntary service organizations creating opportunities for non-formal education, dialogue and engagement, in order to challenge stereotypes and racism. Since 2010 we are deploying volunteering and voluntary service to engage young Roma and non-Roma in a dialogue, non-formal education and challenge stereotypes and racism. More about us you can find at: https://phirenamenca.eu