

# EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

## *How to ensure that the European Pillar of Social Rights delivers on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation?*

### Introduction

On 17 November 2021, the European Union broke new ground by adopting the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (*Social Pillar*), the first set of social rights proclaimed by EU institutions since the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the year 2000. While not legally binding, this comprehensive initiative of 20 social policy principles, complemented by a Social Scoreboard of 14 indicators, aims at supporting well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems, with a focus on better integrating and delivering on social concerns. The European Commission has pledged to make the Social Pillar “**the compass of Europe’s recovery and our best tool to ensuring no one is left behind**”<sup>1</sup>, so that Europe’s future is socially fair and just.

This paper sets out **ERGO Network’s analysis and policy recommendations so that the implementation of the Social Pillar does not leave the European Roma<sup>2</sup> behind**. It builds on the direct experience of our national members on the ground, and it aims to draw positive reinforcing links between the Social Pillar and the recently adopted **EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion**. Delivery on the latter must, in turn, be **fully integrated in the European Semester**, and work in synergy with other key economic and social processes, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. These must be mutually reinforcing processes. Unfortunately, the EU Roma Strategic Framework targets makes few specific **links to the Social Pillar and its 20 principles**, and a footnote even reduces the scope to only 3 principles. The Framework Communication does not mention that the Pillar will also contribute to implementing the Roma Framework - only the other way around. Nothing is said either about the **interplay of the Roma Framework with the European Semester and the European Green Deal**, and how Roma equality, inclusion and participation will be mainstreamed in these overarching EU policy processes. Additionally, it is crucial that the Social Pillar Action Plan itself is placed at the heart of the European Semester processes, including the **new focus on the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the assessment of National Plans** to that effect.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Communication *Commission Work Programme 2021 A Union of vitality in a world of fragility*, 19 October 2020, page 4.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we use the umbrella term “Roma” to encompass diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the European Commission – see here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en)

While it is a crucial framework document for EU social policy, **the Social Pillar is not a strategy per se, as it lacks measurable targets**. The Social Scoreboard does not measure progress towards ambitious objectives, but simply maps Europe in terms of best and worst performers compared to EU averages. The process needs to be reformed so that **the Scoreboard brings about concrete policy triggers for change**. Also, at the moment, the 14 indicators, although grouped under the same headings, do not fully correspond to, nor completely reflect, the 20 policy principles. Additionally, **indicators under the Social Scoreboard should be disaggregated to include data on key groups, such as the Roma**, and also be aligned with the measuring undertaken under the National Roma Strategic Frameworks, to ensure a coherent approach.

The **fight against racism and discrimination in all its forms, including antigypsyism**, must be another key element of the Social Pillar Action Plan, both in itself (under Principle 3), as well as in a cross-cutting manner across the remaining principles, to ensure that Roma in Europe can access employment, education, health, housing, and social protection. The Action Plan must equally work in synergy with other important EU initiatives, such as the Action Plan Against Racism 2020-2024, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Race Equality Directive (RED), Victims' Rights Directive, Employment Equality and Recast Directives, Framework Decision against Racism, Charter for Fundamental Rights, as well as the OSCE Action Plan for Roma and Sinti and the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Action Plan.

With Europe 2020 coming to an end, there is currently no European strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. Encouragingly, the new EU Roma Strategic Framework contains an **explicit cross-cutting priority objective, with concrete targets, to reduce Roma poverty**. The Social Pillar Action Plan must reflect this commitment for all groups across the European Union, and embed a strong anti-poverty dimension, combined with an ambitious **EU-wide poverty-reduction target**.

The implementation of the Social Pillar and its Action Plan remain contingent on the EU and Member States making available the **necessary financial resources** to deliver on the commitments made. In this context, the recovery packages (NextGenEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, InvestEU and ReactEU) and the next programming period 2021-2027 will play a key role. **The European Commission must ensure that mainstream funding reaches the Roma**. Clear guidelines must be given to Governments and Managing Authorities to make sure allocations are made for the vulnerable and Roma especially – including through a **corresponding enabling condition and Roma-specific indicator**, aligned with the National Roma Strategic Frameworks. The Partnership Principle must be reinforced and applied.

The Social Pillar Action Plan will only be effective if it achieves **wide ownership by beneficiaries**, if it is **rooted in direct evidence from the ground**, and if its delivery is underpinned by a comprehensive and meaningful partnership of all stakeholders. **Roma communities and their NGO representatives must be involved at all stages in the design, delivery, and monitoring** of measures, at both national and EU level. Clear dialogue and cooperation protocols need to be put in place, to ensure that the voice of marginalised communities is heard and taken into account, while necessary financial **resources need to be made available to support Roma NGOs** and build awareness, participation, and active citizenship, as well as more resilient democracies.

## **Principle 1: Education, training and lifelong learning**

*Only 53% of young Roma children attend early childhood education. 63% of Roma aged 16-24 are not employed, in education or training<sup>3</sup>. Only 18% of Roma completed higher secondary education or higher; one in three Roma children attends classes where most classmates are Roma<sup>4</sup>. Only 39% of non-Roma would feel comfortable if their children had Roma classmates<sup>5</sup>. Two thirds of Roma and Travellers aged 18–24 years leave school early with at most only lower secondary education. The figures for Roma and Travellers aged 30–34 years achieving tertiary education in 2019 are close to zero.<sup>6</sup>*

Roma children and students are not provided, from a very early age, with the same learning opportunities, as the vicious circles of poverty and discrimination act as powerful barriers in accessing education and training. Subsequently, they have lower attendance and completion rates, which in turn lead to poor labour market integration and social participation. Lack of majority languages skills, limited access to early childhood education and care, and a state of poverty which does not allow for proper studying at home mean that Roma pupils are even sometimes placed in schooling for children with learning disabilities. Additionally, segregated educational establishments breed a sectioned view of society, which fuels inequalities and discrimination. During the Covid-19 pandemic and associated protection and prevention measures, many Roma students found themselves unable to access online education, due to absent infrastructure and equipment (the digital divide). The lack of adequate and accessible second chance schools and opportunities to continue one's education makes it much harder for Roma to resume their studies at a later stage in life. Additionally, Roma typically benefit much less from lifelong learning opportunities for training, finding themselves discriminated against when trying to access them. It is important that targeted lifelong learning and training measures are put in place to guarantee that Roma in general, and young Roma in particular, are prepared for the jobs of the future and can reap the full potential of the green and digital transitions. It is equally important to foster the training of Roma teachers and staff in educational settings, to contribute to diversity and inclusion, as well as to better respond to the needs of Roma pupils and students. In order to ensure that every Roma child gets a good start in life, we must ensure equal access to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning, which is one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, as well as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (4).

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<sup>3</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Roma, 2017 - [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf) (hereinafter *EU FRA 2017*)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019 - [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd2019-320-final\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_implementation\\_of\\_national\\_roma\\_integration\\_strategies\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd2019-320-final_report_on_the_implementation_of_national_roma_integration_strategies_en.pdf) (hereinafter *EC NRIS 2019*)

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, Special Barometer Discrimination in the EU, 2019 - [https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251\\_91\\_4\\_493\\_ENG](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251_91_4_493_ENG) (hereinafter *EC Barometer 2019*)

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma and Travellers in Six Countries, 2020 - [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf) (hereinafter *EU FRA 2020*)

### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Prioritise the specific educational needs of Roma and vulnerable children, with a view to guaranteeing their right to, participation and outcomes in education, and to effectively reducing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma – including through the Child Guarantee.
- End structural discrimination in education settings – abolish Roma-only schools and classes and sanction educational establishments staff and local authorities who discriminate between pupils; ensure that schools do not apply discriminatory measures, such as justifying poor grading or suspension of Roma students because of an inability to follow long-distance learning.
- Acknowledge that segregation is illegal, by amending their legislation to reflect ICERD and RED, and promote a zero-tolerance policy against segregation in education. Systematically monitor and end school and class segregation or misdiagnosis of Roma children, build explicit desegregation programmes and revise national law on education, where relevant.
- Ensure quality, affordable services in Roma communities, specifically with regard to housing, health, nutrition, transport, but also school materials and equipment – including access to computers, electricity and Internet, and the necessary training to use them.
- Invest in early intervention: support efforts to include Roma children in free or affordable, quality early childhood education and care and remove financial and non-financial barriers to access.
- Tackle the high rates of early school leaving for Roma girls and boys by addressing the underlying causes and obstacles. Provide additional targeted support at school for those who need it: train school mediators and in-class assistants to support teachers and educators; provide majority language support (not just for Roma children), and after-hours support with homework; provide free meals within the school setting.
- Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, LGBTQUIA+, and disadvantaged children. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child-, disability- and gender- sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
- Promote positive narratives of diversity and social cohesion within school settings, as well as better awareness of Roma, their history, culture, and traditions. Ensure the teaching of Romani language and history in schools, including about the Holocaust and slavery of Roma. Invest in schoolbooks and teaching materials with the support of Roma scholars and civil society.
- Substantially increase the number of Roma youth and adults with relevant technical and vocational skills to access decent jobs, through targeted programmes for example under the Youth Guarantee, investing in second chance schools, and the recognition of non-formal qualifications, to ensure that people, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to lifelong learning opportunities.
- Ensure that EU emergency funds allocated for tackling Covid-19, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, specifically reflect the needs of Roma and vulnerable children, by identifying binding criteria and indicators, also in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.
- Bring together all stakeholders: Roma and non-Roma pupils, Roma and non-Roma parents, school staff, local authorities, civil society, to identify and implement positive solutions.

## **Principle 2: Gender Equality**

## **Principle 9: Work-life balance**

*Only 16% of Roma women are in employment (compared to 34% of men). 72% of young Roma women are not employed, in education or training (compared to 55% of men)<sup>7</sup>. 40% of Roma women are not in employment or looking for work because of taking care of children / elderly / sick relatives<sup>8</sup>. Every second Roma or Traveller woman in six countries indicates childcare or other home-based obligations as one of the main reasons not to look for work<sup>9</sup>. Three forced sterilization cases against Slovakia were brought and won before the European Court of Human Rights<sup>10</sup>.*

Roma women have been subject to multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and gender-based violence, more so based on their combined ethnicity, gender, and social status. This is particularly important during a pandemic – for instance, gender segregation in the labour market leads to different levels of exposure to Covid-19, particularly for Roma women in frontline jobs – caring professions, shop staff, cleaners etc. Even without a crisis, caring responsibilities usually fall disproportionately on women, which acts as a disincentive to them seeking employment or educational opportunities. With the closure of schools and workplaces due to Covid-19, the unpaid workload of Roma has further increased, while they are also the ones most likely to care for the ill. Childcare facilities, as well as other support services such as long-term care, are often not accessible to Roma families, because of poor territorial coverage, high costs, and institutionalised antigypsyism. In communist Czechoslovakia, Roma women were forcibly sterilised beginning in the 1970s, a practice continuing after 1989 in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Since the 1980s, as many as 90,000 women may have been affected throughout the former Czechoslovakia and at least 300 Roma women have complained that doctors have sterilised them without consent. While no longer a systemic practice, sporadic cases of forced sterilisation of Roma women have been also reported in Hungary. Gender mainstreaming is crucial, since not addressing structural barriers in policies is costly: ineffective implementation of the Racial Equality and the Employment Equality Directives at the national level costs the EU €224–305 billion in lost GDP and €88-110 in lost tax revenue<sup>11</sup>. In order to identify and understand the intersecting discrimination affecting Roma women, data and research with an intersectional perspective need to be strengthened. Gender Equality is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals (5).

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<sup>7</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>8</sup> EC NRIS 2019.

<sup>9</sup> EU FRA 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Namely V.C. v. Slovakia (no. 18968/07), N.B. v. Slovakia (no. 29518/10) and I.G., M.K. and R.H. v. Slovakia (no. 15966/04), in European Court of Human Rights, Factsheet on Roma and Travellers, July 2020, available here: [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Roma\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Roma_ENG.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament, Equality and the Fight against Racism and Xenophobia - The Cost of Non-Europe, available here: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615660/EPRS\\_STU\(2018\)615660\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615660/EPRS_STU(2018)615660_EN.pdf)

### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Include a strong intersectional discrimination component, to enable the development of policies and legislation that adequately address gender inequalities, particularly for groups experiencing multiple discriminations, such as the Roma.
- Specifically address the higher impact of Covid-19 on the health and livelihood of Roma women experiencing poorer health conditions than Roma men.
- Tackle the gender and ethnic pay and pension gap, to ensure that Roma women in paid employment are not doubly penalised by receiving reduced income for equal work.
- Improve access to childcare for Roma families, who often cannot afford it, or cannot access it, by supporting community-based, free care facilities, employing also Roma staff.
- Invest in specific, adequate financial support for Roma single parent households, most of which are led by women, to assist with childcare, rent payments and other household expenses.
- Dismantle gender stereotypes and ideas about traditional gender roles, so as to encourage more men, including Roma men, to pick up their fair share of unpaid work at home.
- Ensure fair and affordable access to quality healthcare for Roma women (and men), including sexual and reproductive health and rights and family planning services.
- Address the risk of gender-based violence which disproportionately affects Roma girls and women, particularly in countries where antigypsyism is also highly prevalent.

### **Principle 3: Equal Opportunities**

*41% of Roma feel they have been discriminated against in everyday situations such as looking for work, at work, housing, health and education. Only 30% of Roma respondents know that there is a law prohibiting discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic origin or religion<sup>12</sup>. 61% of non-Roma think there is widespread discrimination against the Roma in their country, while 77% don't have a Roma friend or acquaintance<sup>13</sup>. Between 18% and 51% of interviewed parents reported their child being verbally harassed in school because they are Roma or Travellers, and between 10% and 20% of respondents felt discriminated against because of being a Roma or Traveller when in contact with school (as parent or student). 45% felt discriminated against in accessing goods and services – for example, when entering a shop (33%) or a restaurant, night club or hotel (27%) or when looking for a job (23%). 44% experienced hate-motivated harassment and 7% were physically attacked, but more than half (53%) did not report it because they thought that nothing would happen, and 16% because they did not know where to go or whom to contact. Roma in the Netherlands (65%) and Travellers in Ireland (65%) reported the highest rates of discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity in the six countries surveyed.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>13</sup> EU Barometer 2019.

<sup>14</sup> EU FRA 2020



Most Roma in Europe continue to face discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes because of their ethnic origin. As a result of antigypsyism, significant parts of the Roma population struggle with poverty, social exclusion and limited access to employment or services, such as education, healthcare, housing and others. Data shows that Roma face disproportionate barriers to accessing health services exacerbated by a lack of insurance or personal identification documents, but also due to distance or discriminatory attitudes. Roma also see their access to justice curtailed – because of financial reasons, lack of information, unwillingness of the justice system to take up their cause, and pervasive discriminatory attitudes. In addition, and much worsened in the Covid-19 crisis, the Roma have been subject to scapegoating, hate speech in the media and public discourse, and disproportionate corrective measures and fines, including – in several instances across countries – racially-motivated police violence and brutality. The new EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion contains the fight against antigypsyism as a cross-cutting priority, an element which should be fully mainstreamed in the Social Pillar Action Plan. It includes a very good reference to antigypsyism, using the wording proposed by the [Alliance against Antigypsyism](#). Member States are called upon to dismantle and prevent systemic / institutional / structural discrimination experienced by Roma, as well as to curb hate speech in the public discourse and the media. Antigypsyism must be recognised and enshrined in EU and national legislation on equal footing with other forms of discrimination, such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and combatted in all its forms. Moreover, the Action Plan against Racism must be fully mainstreamed in the Action Plan for the Social Pillar. Ensuring equal opportunities goes through comprehensively tackling multiple and intersectional discriminations, including in what concerns Roma women and children, Roma LGBTQIA+, Roma with disabilities, elder Roma etc. The EU Roma Strategic Framework further proposed an intersectional approach to tackle discrimination, defining intersectional discrimination as such for the first time. The diversity within Roma communities, in what concerns multiple ethnic groups across Europe, must be recognised, while protecting and promoting Roma identity and cultural heritage. Reduced inequalities is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals (10).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Recognize antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, as defined by the European Commission and European Parliament. Ensure a rights-based approach and implementation of the Rule of Law that will strengthen the understanding of Roma as communities deprived of their rights, rather than as “vulnerable”. Implement the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (ICERD).
- Mainstream the fight against racism and antigypsyism across all Social Pillar principles, as it is a key structural driver of Roma exclusion that undermines the process intended to decrease Roma deprivation. End any form of structural antigypsyism, including all forms of segregation, forced evictions, environmental injustice and other, in education, employment, health, housing, and access to social protection and other services.
- Set clear, measurable objectives for the fight against discrimination, antigypsyist speech and crime, in line with the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law and the Race Equality Directive. Develop structural and impact indicators to measure progress in fighting antigypsyism / anti-Roma racism.

- Require statistical data that is disaggregated by ethnic background when measuring progress across the Social Pillar principles, including in the use of the Scoreboard, and establish links with the measuring conducted under the EU Roma Strategic Framework.
- Monitor and sanction the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech and the scapegoating of Roma by the media, politicians or public figures, including the ethnicising of crimes allegedly committed by Roma in the public discourse.
- Rigorously investigate incidents of police abuse to ensure there is no impunity for introducing and/or implementing repressive, violent measures against Roma individuals or communities, as well as for inducing fear and intimidation.
- Address the inadequate access to justice of Roma, particularly obstacles to seek legal counsel and redress, lack of free legal aid, but also biased police recordings and reporting, prosecution and court judgements, violence in police custody and ill-treatment by police and the overrepresentation of Roma in prisons.
- Set up “Truth and Reconciliation Committees” and/or “Independent expert commissions on antigypsyism / anti-Roma racism” to address historic injustices such as slavery, forced sterilisations of Roma women, school segregation of Roma children etc.
- Establish a formal mechanism to regularly analyse and assess the impact of laws and regulations from an anti-discrimination perspective, following for example Germany’s monitoring and information body on anti-Semitism.

### ***Principle 4: Active Support to Employment***

*40% of Roma reported feeling discriminated against when looking for work<sup>15</sup>, as well as every fourth Roma and Traveller in six countries<sup>16</sup>. 45% of non-Roma think that not enough is being done to promote diversity in the workplace in what concerns Roma workers, while only 64% would feel comfortable having a Roma co-worker<sup>17</sup>. 26% of men and 11% of women among Roma and Travellers in six countries think it is hopeless to look for a job or think they will not be hired because of their Roma and Traveller background. 25% of all Roma and Travellers who had looked for work in the 12 months preceding the survey felt discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity<sup>18</sup>.*

Public Employment Services, and particularly private employment agencies, often engage in ‘creaming’ practices, where those easiest to place are supported first, while those furthest from the labour market, which often include Roma jobseekers, are left behind. An “employment-first” approach doesn’t always work when dealing with people in complex, difficult circumstances such as poverty, debt, low skills, poor health, inadequate housing, etc. These require tailored, integrated approaches, rooted in the reality of each individual and providing comprehensive pathways, which begin with adequate income and quality services. This approach is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic reality, with Roma communities having been disproportionately hit

<sup>15</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>16</sup> EU FRA 2020.

<sup>17</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>18</sup> EU FRA 2020.



by Covid-19 and associated measures. Lastly, diversity is not considered an asset in the labour market, and discrimination in the job market – on behalf of employment services, employers, other employees etc. – is insufficiently tackled. Having more Roma in employment breaks the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, helps counter widespread discrimination, creates positive role models and contributes to a more inclusive and resilient economy. Employment is one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, while decent work is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (8).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- End structural discrimination in access to employment and in the workplace by supporting the full implementation of the Racial Equality and the Employment Equality Directives, with a specific emphasis on combatting antigypsyism.
- Ensure that Public Employment Services have the necessary resources (staff, training) to adequately support Roma jobseekers in a personalised way, rooted in a comprehensive Active Inclusion approach, including enabling services and adequate income support, and developed with the full ownership of the beneficiaries.
- Invest in infrastructure and quality, affordable and accessible public services such as childcare and healthcare for the Roma, which can greatly contribute to stimulating their employment, as well as their productivity and job performance.
- Strengthen measures supporting initial work experience or providing on-the-job training, including apprenticeships, internships, entry-level positions, social economy, subsidised and adapted workplaces, lifelong learning, access to opportunities for progression by using the full potential of the European Social Fund (ESF).
- Promote positive narratives of diversity in the workplace – provide anti-discrimination training for Public Employment Services, employers, and staff; sanction any occurrence of discrimination; invest in adapted workplaces; reward diversity employers.
- Bring together all stakeholders: Roma and non-Roma job seekers, workers and employers, public and private employment services, Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, local authorities, etc to identify and implement positive solutions.

### ***Principle 5: Secure and adaptable employment***

### ***Principle 6: Wages***

### ***Principle 10: Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment***

*Only 1 in 4 Roma aged 16 years or older reports ‘employed’ or ‘self-employed’ as their main activity. Only 43% of Roma aged 20-64% are in paid work. 41% of Roma feel they have been discriminated against over the past 5 years in everyday situations, including looking for work and at work<sup>19</sup>. The share of Roma and Travellers in paid work in six countries ranges from 15% in Ireland to 55% in the Netherlands, well below the employment rate of the general population<sup>20</sup>.*

<sup>19</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>20</sup> EU FRA 2020.

Lack of support and intervention early on means that a very high number of Roma come from a background of poverty and low skills, which in turn means that many of them can only access precarious, low-paid employment. Even if employed, they are more likely to experience discrimination and antigypsyism and be treated unfairly in the workplace, such as being paid less (ethnic pay gap), being overlooked for promotions or learning opportunities, or being given dangerous or unsuitable tasks. As many Roma are employed in frontline positions – healthcare and educational facilities, commerce, hospitality industry, public authorities etc. – they have also been particularly exposed to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to those in standard, paid employment, many Roma earn their livelihood from atypical forms of work – as traders, craftspeople, artists, seasonal workers etc., which are often not covered by adequate labour protection legislation, which would give access to employment rights and social security. Increasingly, Roma living in poverty, including on garbage sites, see themselves forced to engage with garbage collection and recycling, in unregulated and unsanitary conditions which bring about an incredibly detrimental health impact. We must ensure that Roma workers can access quality, sustainable, meaningful jobs with adequate pay, on equal footing with non-Roma workers, and that they are safe from harassment and discrimination, as well as from hazard, in the workplace. Employment is one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, while decent work is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (8).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Put in place concrete strategies to combat antigypsyism and promote diversity in the workplace, targeting both employers and co-workers, for example through the use EU funds to provide anti-bias and equality training.
- Support quality, sustainable job creation as well as bridges into employment that Roma workers can access. Use public employment schemes as a temporary solution for unemployment as an opportunity for re-qualification and further training, while ensuring that the jobs thus created are stable and of quality, with adequate pay, working conditions, and employment rights.
- Regularise informal work: make sure seasonal workers, craftspeople, traders, artists and the self-employed are covered by employment legislation contracts giving access to decent work rights, including social security rights.
- Promote adequate statutory minimum wages at a level of at least 60% of median wages, complemented by the reference budgets methodology; support wage transparency and ethnic- and gender-neutral job evaluations, as a key means to combat the ethnic and gender pay gap and discrimination in remuneration and wage bargaining.
- Ensure that all employers have an obligation to provide protective equipment (masks, disinfectants), as well as a healthy and safe work environment that respects all legal protocols to prevent the spread of Covid-19, as well as other diseases, particularly to frontline workers.
- Improve access to finance for Roma entrepreneurs, as well as provide technical assistance, adapted financial products, and access to market opportunities.
- Support social economy initiatives, particularly Work Integration Social Enterprises, which provide quality jobs for those furthest from the labour market.

## **Principle 7: Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals**

### **Principle 8: Social dialogue and involvement of workers**

*82% of Roma are unaware of organisations offering support to victims of discrimination<sup>21</sup>.*

ERGO Network has reached out to the main trade union umbrella organisations at Brussels level – the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the European Public Service Union (EPSU), the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), and UNI Europa – in an attempt to understand the degree of representation of Roma workers in trade union structures. It appears that such information is unknown. Our national members were equally unable to locate this information. However, the consensus was that there seemed to be low coverage of trade union membership among Roma workers, which in turn leads to less visibility of the specific issues Roma workers have, such as the ethnic pay gap or discrimination in the workplace. This situation is even more serious when we take into account that evidence from all countries shows that the Roma are overrepresented in exploitative forms of employment (including the informal economy), because of a lack of knowledge of their rights. The Roma overwhelmingly work in jobs that are low paid, on zero-hours contracts, often in factory-based environments or other that require hard physical work. The consequences for large numbers of the Roma community are inconsistent working hours and, therefore, unpredictable income. Insecure contracts lead to vulnerability to abuse, as Roma in these working environments are often asked to work extra unpaid hours and are too scared to make complaints, even in cases of sexual harassment or unfair / unlawful dismissal. The Roma might be a desirable workforce at busy times, but in lulls they are also the first to be dropped off. The Roma working in the “grey” economy continue to be vulnerable – even invisible – workers, finding it very difficult to assert their employment rights.

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan

- Improve the collection of disaggregated data in trade union membership, in order to have a clearer picture of how the different concerns of vulnerable workers, including but not limited to Roma workers, are taken up in collective bargaining.
- Encourage and support, including financially, anti-bias and anti-discrimination trainings for social partners, to build better awareness of the specific issues faced by minority workers and other vulnerable groups on the labour market, so that these issues can become a part of social dialogue.
- Support information campaigns for workers about their employment rights, including in the Romani language, and put in place specific outreach measures for Roma workers.
- Ensure that Labour Inspectorates and the European Labour Authority protect and promote a work environment where recourse and appeal are available to all without prejudice or discrimination.
- Invest in specific provisions that cover the most vulnerable workers, such as seasonal and migrant workers and those in the informal economy, not covered by standard contracts.

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<sup>21</sup> EU FRA 2017

## **Principle 11: Childcare and support to children**

*Every third Roma child (30%) lives in households where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month. Only about half (53%) of young Roma children are enrolled in early childhood education and care programmes<sup>22</sup>. With the exception of Sweden, participation of Roma and Traveller children in early childhood education in six countries is far below the target set by the EU's Education and Training Strategy. In Sweden, every fifth Roma and Traveller child (22%) went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month, while every second Roma or Traveller child lives in a household that has difficulties or great difficulties in making ends meet. Every fourth Roma and Traveller child in six countries lives in a household affected by severe material deprivation<sup>23</sup>.*

The first years of a child's life are the most important in their personal development, and yet Roma children have been left behind for centuries in terms of what constitutes a good start in life. Poverty and lack of access to basic services has a considerable impact on children's physical, mental, and emotional development, and increases the chances of lagging behind in all aspects of their adult life. While education, including early childhood education and care, is touted to be free in many countries, in reality this is not the case, and many poor Roma families can't cope with the associated costs of clothing, nappies, transport, hygiene etc. Additionally, many Roma neighbourhoods are segregated or isolated, with no childcare facilities nearby. Roma parents and their children are often turned away due to institutional antigypsyism. Cuts in national spending on social protection and public services have left Roma communities in a dire situation, with poor living conditions which in turn determine poor health and lower educational outcomes. Additional complicating factors include the lack of identity papers or of a fixed address, lack of information about registration processes and available services, as well as language barriers. The Covid-19 situation highlights the urgent need to invest in proper care services and support to children and their families. In order to provide equal opportunities for every Roma child, we must guarantee that Roma children and parents have access to affordable early child education and care of a good quality which is line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child and with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4.2.

### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Enact the thorough implementation of the Investing in Children Recommendation of 2013 through an ambitious Child Guarantee that specifically includes and targets the multiple needs of Roma children, to ensure their healthy and harmonious development.
- Provide children in need with free, nutritious, healthy meals, through school meal programmes as well as soup kitchens, social cafeterias and hot meals delivered directly in the community, to avoid holiday hunger.

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<sup>22</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>23</sup> EU FRA 2020

- There are no poor children in rich families – ensure wrap-around support for parents, including adequate income, decent living conditions, access to quality healthcare and other essential services, and opportunities for quality employment.
- Support quality, affordable or even free community-based childcare services that Roma parents can access, including through social economy initiatives.
- Combat discrimination against Roma parents and their children in both public and private early childhood education and care facilities, by providing anti-bias training and resources and ensuring diversity and Roma workers also within the staff.
- Foster cooperation between early childhood education and care services and parents, to support active participation of Roma parents, and raise awareness about pre-primary school benefits among them.
- Increase the capacity of pre-school personnel to provide quality, inclusive education including diversity games and awareness about Roma language, culture, history, and employ Roma staff.

**Principle 12: Social Protection**  
**Principle 13: Unemployment Benefits**  
**Principle 14: Minimum Income**

*80% of Roma are at risk of poverty. In Spain (98%), Greece (96%) and Croatia (93%), this means almost the entire Roma population. Every fourth Roma (27%) live in households where someone went to bed hungry. 92% of Roma indicate that they face difficulties in making ends meet. 44% of Roma live in low-work-intensity households<sup>24</sup>.*

Most Roma in Europe experience both relative as well as absolute levels of poverty and social exclusion, with rates multiple times higher than those for the non-Roma population. In a cash-based economy, the impact of cash transfers on the poverty rate, monitored explicitly by the Social Scoreboard, is a key indicator, particularly where less than 50% of Roma are in standard, paid employment. The latter means that the Roma are often not eligible for contributive benefits, such as unemployment allowance or pension. If they are, such benefits are often accompanied by strict conditionality and sanctions, which Roma jobseekers can't always comply with, since poverty and precariousness themselves act as lock-in barriers to seeking employment. Lack of information about one's rights and complex bureaucratic processes and further deterrents for the Roma to access the necessary resources that would allow them to survive and thrive. In Ireland, access to basic social protection payments or the associated state-funded employment services and training schemes are contingent upon presenting proof of habitual residence – due to a restrictive transposition of the European Directive 2004/38 – which many Roma living in Ireland are unable to provide, thus being cut out from supports. In many Member States, social protection, including minimum income, is set at inadequate levels, which don't allow the recipients and their families to lead dignified lives. Additionally, non take-up of entitlements is a

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<sup>24</sup> EU FRA 2017.

prevalent phenomenon in Roma communities, motivated by a wide range of factors – from facing discrimination and antigypsyism from state offices, to facing “double” stigma from the wider population for being both Roma and a benefit claimant. Access to adequate income schemes is a necessary prerequisite of social and economic inclusion, as well as the cornerstone for our European Social Model, which must work for all. Investment in strong, sound social protection systems is beneficial for all, and ensuring equal access to financial resources is paramount, to ensure that people can access opportunities and reach their full potential. Reducing poverty is a cross-cutting priority objective of the new EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, while ending poverty and hunger are also Sustainable Development Goals (1, 2). We hope to see a strong poverty-reduction dimension and target also in the EPSR Action Plan.

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Enact an EU Framework Directive on Minimum Income, based on art 153, 1, h TFEU, which would include common definitions of adequacy, linked to the 60% of median income (poverty line), complemented by reference budgets to ensure purchasing power.
- Governments must invest in rights-based activation strategies, that put the beneficiary at the core and ensure ownership through personalised approaches that can't always follow an *employment-first* approach. Put an end to punitive conditionality, which involves sanctions and benefit cuts, and which only contributes to further exclusion and hardship.
- Provide anti-discrimination training to public offices disbursing social protection and penalise discriminatory behaviours in relation to minority recipients, including the Roma. Combat the public discourse which stigmatises benefit claimants and people experiencing poverty.
- Make entitlements automatic (rather than having to be applied for), to ensure that lack of knowledge of one's rights does not act as a deterrent to receiving entitlements, as well as to eliminate red tape and simplify delivery.
- Put in place programmes that ensure that social protection entitlements are accessible to categories of the population experiencing multiple difficulties in accessing them, such as not knowing how to read or write, not having an ID card, not having a fixed address or a bank account, not being able to apply online etc.
- Roll out specific provisions to ensure that those who work in the informal economy are also entitled to income support, particularly during the pandemic and in its aftermath, and shield this income from penalties deriving from previous debt and arrears.
- Annually measure Roma poverty through Eurostat, using the combined AROPE indicator – at risk of poverty, material deprivation, and households with low work intensity – to be able to keep track of the multifaceted aspects of poverty and social exclusion in Roma communities.
- In order to design an effective social safety net, consider piloting targeted social audits to identify poverty risks that stem from the intersectional vulnerabilities of Roma.
- The fight against poverty and social exclusion should be made a transversal dimension through the Action Plan implementation, ensuring that quality, sustainable employment opportunities, inclusive education, quality housing, and adequate healthcare contribute to the overall improvement of Roma wellbeing and quality of life, in an Active Inclusion approach.



## **Principle 15: Old age income and pensions**

*Roma people have between 5 to 10-year shorter life expectancy compared to other groups. 55% of Roma women aged 50+ are in bad health compared to 29% of non-Roma women<sup>25</sup>. Life expectancy at birth for Roma women in six countries is 9.8 years shorter than among women in the general population, while for Roma men the gap is wider at 10.2 years<sup>26</sup>.*

Older Roma in Europe often find themselves in a more difficult situation than their non-Roma counterparts of the same age. A life spent in poverty, often with inadequate housing and nutrition and in difficult working conditions, leads to health inequalities such as shorter life expectancy and increased health risks and chronic diseases. The current pandemic has placed them at higher risk of contagion, since access to basic sanitary measures is not a given in Roma communities, and older persons with underlying health issues are a particularly vulnerable group. Older Roma are also in a significantly difficult income situation, given low employment rates and overrepresentation in precarious, low-paid work or atypical employment. These give access to no or low pension entitlements, in a circumstance where older Roma face additional costs deriving from poorer health status and limited access to health and long-term care. Additionally, prevalent negative attitudes, discrimination and stereotypes against both Roma and older people place older Roma in a particularly vulnerable position in society.

### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Ensure that the support provided to Roma people follows a life-cycle approach, which includes age-appropriate measures to deal with different realities per age group.
- Provide adequate statutory minimum pensions available to all regardless of previous employment status, to avoid older Roma falling into even deeper poverty and exclusion. Ensure that such schemes are enough to provide for dignified living, and accessible to Roma claimants (see section above on access to social protection and minimum income).
- Explicitly prioritise older Roma in Covid-19 responses and beyond, to guarantee their access to protective equipment, sanitation and decent as well as quality healthcare, including vaccines and medicines, and long-term care.
- Support access to lifelong learning opportunities for older Roma, as well as active ageing and decent employment, through targeted interventions such as second-chance schools and adapted workplaces that respond to their needs.
- Pay particular attention to the plight of older Roma women, who experience additional disadvantages because of poor health, low employment record, and vulnerability to gender-based violence, as well as intersectional discrimination.
- Counter pervasive ageism in conjunction with antigypsyism in public policy as well as public discourse, to ensure that older Roma do not suffer from multiple discriminations and are able to access their full rights and social participation.

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<sup>25</sup> AGE Platform Europe, Older Roma, a forgotten dramatic experience of ageing in time of pandemic, 2020 - <https://age-platform.eu/policy-work/news/older-roma-forgotten-dramatic-experience-ageing-time-pandemic>

<sup>26</sup> EU FRA 2020.

**Principle 16: Health care**  
**Principle 17: Inclusion of people with disabilities**  
**Principle 18: Long-term care**

*One in four (26%) Roma is not covered by national health insurance and/or private insurance<sup>27</sup>. 28% of Roma feel limited in their activities by their state of health. 22% of Roma have a longstanding illness or health problem<sup>28</sup>. There is a 10-year difference in life expectancy between Roma (64 years) and non-Roma (74 years), as well as a tenfold higher vulnerability to tuberculosis.<sup>29</sup> One in 10 Roma and Travellers felt discriminated against when accessing healthcare in six countries, while almost all report worse health and more limitations than the general population<sup>30</sup>.*

A significant health inequality gap exists between Roma and the majority population. This inequality gap persists across every area of physical and mental health and wellbeing, including rates of suicide<sup>31</sup>, life expectancy, and infant mortality. The significant health inequality gap arises from compounding social determinants, such as poverty, inadequate housing, lack of sanitation, poor nutrition, hard physical labour in unsuitable conditions, high levels of discrimination and racism in accessing healthcare, as well as impaired access to both healthcare and long-term care services, and also medicines. The life expectancy of Roma across Europe is 10 to 15 years lower than that of the majority population. In some Member States, many Roma living in poverty who are eligible to apply for subsidised medical care are unable to access such supports due to language, literacy, and information and bureaucracy barriers.<sup>32</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic presents a very worrying vista in regard to health outcomes for Roma children and adults. In April 2020, FRA and the OSCE sounded the alarm about the significant risk that the virus posed to Roma communities, given their status as a highly marginalised and disadvantaged<sup>33</sup>. Specific health issues noted were: the inability to socially distance and self-quarantine, or to maintain good hand hygiene in a context of overcrowding in accommodation without adequate facilities. Another OSCE report from July 2020 notes that authorities have largely failed to ensure Roma

<sup>27</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>28</sup> EU NRIS 2019.

<sup>29</sup> European Environmental Bureau, ERGO Network, Environmental Justice - Pushed to the wastelands: Environmental racism against Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe, 2020, available here: <https://mk0eeborgicuyptuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Pushed-to-the-Wastelands.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> EU FRA 2020.

<sup>31</sup> In Ireland, the suicide rate for Travellers is six times that of non-Travellers: European Commission (October 2018). [Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy: Assessing progress in four key policy areas of the strategy](#). Prepared by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. EU Commission DG. Justice and Consumers, Brussels. Page 24.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Page 20: European Commission (October 2019). [Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy: Identifying blind spots in Traveller and Roma inclusion policy](#). prepared by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. EU Commission DG. Justice and Consumers, Brussels.

<sup>33</sup> Press Release issued to mark International Roma Day (April 7, 2020) [Persistent Roma inequality increases COVID-19 risk, human rights heads say](#). OSCE and EU FRA.

communities can access information about emergency measures and their necessity, and on how to prevent the spread of the virus. The report also notes a “surge in inflammatory (anti-Roma, media) articles” following the onset of the crisis, blaming Roma for spreading the virus and presenting them as a risk to the majority population: in some States, civil society organisations noted an increase in Roma-targeted hate-crime and hate-speech<sup>34</sup>. Entire settlements were placed in quarantine and cut off from the world without any accompanying provision of basic supplies. Many Roma also have underlying health issues, which put them in increased jeopardy. This is a situation they have to face all their life, not just during a pandemic, and the situation is twice as hard for Roma living with a physical or mental disability when trying to access employment, social protection, or supportive services such as long-term care. The public health infrastructure in many countries does not cover local communities, with the nearest clinic (not to mention hospital) often located far away. Private clinics are often prohibitively expensive for people on low incomes, and various administrative obstacles (such as lack of an ID card or a legal address) are impediments to obtaining insurance. Investing in people must mean, first and foremost, guaranteeing good health and wellbeing for all, particularly disadvantaged communities such as the Roma. Good health is one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, and it is also supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (3).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Prioritise access to user-friendly health information, care, and testing services, as well as to programmes of future vaccination or immunization against Covid-19 for Roma communities, and particularly those Roma over 45. Without specific outreach, they will miss out.
- Roll out mass vaccination programs, not only for Covid-19 but also for other diseases, as the pandemic measures will likely increase the number of non-vaccinated Roma children.
- Ensure universal health insurance coverage among Roma, at least 95%, and reduce the disproportionate exposure of Roma to public health and environmental harms.
- Significantly reduce, with the aim of eliminating completely, the health inequality gap between the Roma and the majority population, through both mainstream as well as targeted health strategies, using a social determinants of health approach.
- Ensure non-discriminatory, equal access to health and long-term care by condemning all forms of discrimination and exclusion from health care services and by supporting anti-bias training and awareness raising of medical staff of specific Roma health needs.
- Scale up and reinforce the health mediators’ scheme, which provides an invaluable link between medical professionals and Roma communities. Roma health mediators must be formally recognised as a profession and paid adequately according to their work and the value they bring.
- Provide compensated medication or other forms of financial support for those on low incomes, however prioritising the provision of universal healthcare, free at the point of use.
- Establish internal control systems to monitor the quality of health services for Roma, including emergency assistance, that would include racism audits of health institutions.

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<sup>34</sup> July 2020. [OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic](#). Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

- Improve nutrition and fight unhealthy living conditions, reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and pollution. Support universal access to drinking water as well as sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation.
- Reduce Roma maternal and infant mortality, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (prenatal and postnatal care, counselling and family planning), and provide reparations for victims of forced sterilization. End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of women and children.
- Address the prevention and fight against drug addiction, HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis, cardio-vascular diseases, premature births, with an emphasis on harm reduction.
- Ensure that Roma with disabilities or long-standing illnesses can benefit on equal footing from available support schemes (income, services, adapted housing and workplaces, care etc) and strive to improve the overall quality, accessibility, and affordability of such services for all.
- Support an independent living approach to long-term care, promoting deinstitutionalisation while ensuring that the burden of care does not fall on relatives.

### ***Principle 19: Housing and assistance for homeless***

*One in three Roma (32%) live in households with a leaking roof, damp walls, or rot. One in five Roma (20%) live in dwellings that are too dark. 41% of Roma felt discriminated when looking for housing<sup>35</sup>. 76% of Roma live in a neighbourhood where all or most residents are Roma. 78% of Roma live in overcrowded households<sup>36</sup>. Up to 10% of caravan dwellers and Roma were evicted at least once in the past five years in Belgium and France. 26% of Roma and Travellers live in housing with bad conditions. Travellers in Ireland are especially affected by bad housing conditions such as leaking roofs, mould and damp walls<sup>37</sup>.*

Europe is facing a deep housing crisis ever since the last financial recession ten years ago, if not before. Accommodation is scarce, and costs are prohibitive, with housing expenses representing an ever-increasing share of household disposable incomes. In this context, Roma communities are particularly hard hit, as they are frequently unable to meet housing costs, a situation which often results in evictions and entire families ending up homeless. Not being able to legally prove ownership of a family abode that has been used for generations is another common factor that leads to forced evictions. Last but not least, the Roma are forced to leave their homes because of blatant displays of antigypsyism on behalf of local authorities, who move them to unsuitable encampments out of sight. In Ireland, Travellers are significantly over-represented in the homeless population, however one third of all local authorities in 2018 consistently failed to utilise their ring-fenced Traveller accommodation budgets<sup>38</sup>. Two state-commissioned reports show that the key reason was opposition to proposed Traveller-specific planning applications by

<sup>35</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>36</sup> EU NRIS 2019.

<sup>37</sup> EU FRA 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Input by Deputy Eoin O’Broin, Sinn Fein, to [Dáil Eireann debate, 20 February](#), 2019.

members of the public and elected representatives<sup>39</sup>. Banished at the margins, many Roma end up living in informal settlements and segregated neighbourhoods, in inadequate dwellings, without access to utilities' infrastructure, and in unsanitary conditions. Many communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental degradation and pollution stemming from waste dumps and landfills, contaminated sites, or dirty industries. Around half of Romanian Roma live close to waste dumps. The Covid-19 pandemic has evidenced that poor housing conditions represent a systemic risk for the public health system, placing a disproportionate burden on Roma inhabitants and requiring a longer-term government response to build resilience. Europe should honour its commitments and deliver on adequate housing for the Roma, one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, supported also in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (11).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Regulate and implement in practice the concept of “adequate housing” for all, including Roma, as defined by the United Nations<sup>40</sup>: “Adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and durability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water-supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities: all of which should be available at an affordable cost”.
- Recovery efforts must include temporary suspension of mortgage payments and utility bills, a suspension of forced closing of utility services and evictions for families at risk as a result of the pandemic, particularly those already experiencing difficulties, such as the Roma.
- Establish a legal framework to provide effective protection against unlawful evictions, in line with international human rights standards. Support the legalisation of informal settlements and property rights for dwellings where Roma live.
- Provide for permanent, decent, affordable, environmentally safe, desegregated housing for Roma in the case of lawful evictions, which must be strictly defined by legislation enshrining a human rights approach. This should include consultations with the community, reasonable notice, provision of information, effective legal remedies and free legal assistance.
- Invest in long-term solutions to address inadequate, overcrowded housing conditions and lack of access to basic utilities in Roma communities, by delivering quality social housing which is accessible to the Roma, and by capping rents and property prices for family dwellings.
- Define segregation as illegal in housing, in conformity with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (ICERD), which condemns in Article 3 “apartheid and racial segregation” and obliges parties to “prevent, prohibit and eradicate” these practices in territories under their jurisdiction, as well as includes “an obligation to eradicate the consequences of past policies of segregation, and to prevent racial segregation arising from the actions of private individuals.”

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<sup>39</sup> Department of Housing Planning and Local Government (July 2019). Op cit. and RSM (June 2017). [Review of Funding for Traveller Specific Accommodation Programmes](#). The Housing Agency, Dublin.

<sup>40</sup> Paragraph 60 of the United Nations Habitat Agenda, and General Comments Nos. 4 and 7 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR).

- Undertake a systematic review of housing legislation, policies and practices in Member States and remove all provisions and procedures that result in direct or indirect discrimination against Roma. Establish adequate mechanisms to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination laws and allow for participation of Roma representatives and NGOs at all stages of monitoring.
- Affirm and ensure the right of people to pursue a nomadic lifestyle and provide the necessary quality infrastructure (camping sites etc) for such lifestyles to be pursued. Invest in creative alternatives to by-pass the need for a fixed address to access services and income.
- Integrate a new policy focus on environmental justice, in particular regarding the disproportionate exposure of Roma to environmental degradation, pollution and natural hazards, the denial of environmental services, and forced evictions – as well as the relationship between environmental degradation in segregated settlements and poor health outcomes.
- Establish appropriate monitoring mechanisms to ensure the implementation of housing policies and practices for Roma, involving Roma representatives through the process.
- Ensure targeted EU funding for addressing Roma housing exclusion, through better quality housing and living conditions for Roma. Substantial resources must be made available in national programming for inclusive housing projects accessible to Roma in the framework of multi-fund programmes combining the ERDF and ESF.
- The EU should continue and further initiate infringement proceedings against Member States in cases where EU law has been breached and follow up on the proceedings, including in cases of forced evictions.

### ***Principle 20: Access to essential services***

*30% of Roma live in households with no tap water. 46% have no indoor toilet, shower or bathroom. One in ten Roma live in housing without electricity<sup>41</sup>. Every fourth Roma and Traveller in five countries does not have a bank account, a percentage much higher than in the general population<sup>42</sup>. Around a fifth of Caravan dwellers in Belgium, and Gypsies and Travellers in the United Kingdom, do not have access to tap water or electricity at halting sites, while lack of access to public services such as public transport or post is notably high in France<sup>43</sup>.*

The Roma in Europe face multiple obstacles in accessing good quality, affordable essential services. Basic utilities, such as energy or sanitation, are either too expensive for the low budgets that most Roma families live on, or the infrastructure is completely missing to deliver such services to their homes. Many Roma communities are located far from key services, forcing Roma residents to undertake expensive, lengthy journeys to the nearest service provider. Transport links with Roma settlements, particularly informal ones, are often poor or non-existent, and the cost is prohibitive. In some countries, a significant number of Roma lack identity papers, which is partly due to, as well as results in, a lack of a legal address, which in turn significantly hinders consumers in accessing services, both public and private. Concrete examples include the inability

<sup>41</sup> EU FRA 2017.

<sup>42</sup> EU FRA 2020.

<sup>43</sup> EU FRA 2020.



to access financial services such as a bank account, or to register for health insurance or social services and income support. In a world that is increasingly moving to the online space, the digital divide sees most Roma left behind on the losing side, due to both lack of equipment and infrastructure, as well as the cost of connecting, with very damaging impacts on the ability to, for instance, follow online education. Last but not least, Roma consumers are faced with deeply rooted, widespread discrimination and antigypsyism when trying to access services, which constitutes a clear infringement of their human rights. Access to clean water and sanitation, as well as to affordable and clean energy, are also Sustainable Development Goals (6, 7).

#### Recommendations for the Action Plan:

- Urgently address the lack of water, adequate sanitation, and electricity, as well as the corresponding needed infrastructure, in Roma communities. This could be done by reconnecting families or settlements cut off from utilities, or by the regular delivery of water by vehicle to the settlements. Adequate subsidies for families in need to cover utilities should also be put in place.
- Develop a comprehensive transport infrastructure that ensures that people can get where they need to go and that communities are not cut off. Subsidise or cap transport costs to protect vulnerable consumers and ensure their rights.
- Immediate steps should be taken to resolve the issues of lack or renewal of identity and lack of legal status, in order to ensure access to rights, services, and resources.
- Provisions should be put in place to tackle the digital divide in a comprehensive way, with targeted interventions for the most vulnerable users, such as the Roma, ensuring that they have free or at least affordable access to both equipment (PC, smartphone, tablet) as well as needed infrastructure (network coverage, internet subscription, electricity etc).
- Invest in community-based services, including through social economy initiatives, to both create local jobs as well as to respond to community needs where and when they arise.
- Combat all forms of discrimination, including antigypsyism, on behalf of service providers, public and private, by the necessary legal measures and diversity training to ensure equal access and respect for all consumers.

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*This input was drafted between May and November 2020 by [Amana Ferro](#), Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network Secretariat in Brussels. It builds on a comprehensive body of work and policy positions previously developed by the ERGO Network, namely around the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, the European Semester, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Roma communities, as well as specific thematic work carried out on topics such as youth employment, social economy, and children's rights (among others). This input was further enriched by specific contributions from the ERGO Network national membership, and was endorsed in November 2020.*