The EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030 – Policy brief

On 7 October 2020, the European Commission published its proposal for a new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030. The package proposed by the European Commission includes:

- A communication
- A proposal for a Council recommendation
- Guidelines for planning and implementing national Roma strategic frameworks (annex 1)
- A portfolio of indicators (annex 2)
- A staff working document laying out the context of the proposal, the legal basis and the methodology adopted to prepare this framework

EU Roma framework up to 2020

The first EU Roma framework for national Roma integration strategies covered the period 2010-2020 and was considered useful to place Roma inclusion high on the EU and national policy agendas. Yet numerous studies have shown that it resulted in very limited progress for improving Roma people’s lives and decreasing the gaps between Roma and non-Roma.

The covid-19 pandemic additionally highlighted a number of pre-existing conditions leading to Roma people being more exposed to negative health and socio-economic impacts, as well as discrimination.

The EU neighbouring countries had aligned voluntarily on the 2020 EU Roma framework. In the Western Balkans, they have achieved “remarkable advances”, according to the European Commission. They have committed to continue aligning their work on the new EU Roma strategic framework.

Structure of the new EU Roma strategic framework

As indicated by its name, the EU Roma framework post 2020 includes 3 horizontal areas - equality, inclusion and participation - in addition to the 4 pre-existing sectoral approaches on education, employment, housing and health. To address all these issues, the European Commission calls for a combination of mainstreaming Roma inclusion into all relevant policies and targeted policies explicitly for helping Roma people (but not exclusively for Roma).

A strong focus is put on equality and the fight against discrimination and anti-gypsyism to complement the inclusion approach. The European Commission stresses the need to include all Roma (not only marginalised communities).

The new EU Roma strategic framework also reflects better the diversity among Roma population. EU mobile citizens of Roma ethnicity are included in this very same framework and specific attention is put on women, youth, LGBTI+, elderly, Roma with disabilities, stateless, among other Roma groups.
National frameworks

The European Commission calls on EU member states to develop national Roma frameworks by September 2021.

Following a similar structure to the European framework, national frameworks should address anti-gypsyism and discrimination, socio-economic inclusion of (marginalised) Roma, and cooperation and participation measures, as well as the 4 thematic areas of education, employment, housing and health.

Recommended measures include:

- **Promote equality**: fight anti-gypsyism; provide support to victims; promote Roma cultures, language and history; include positive narratives
- **Combat deprivation and poverty**: ensure access to social protection; provide income support and activation measures; prevent and combat child poverty; support financial literacy
- **Participation**: ensure participation of Roma people in public and political life; provide capacity building; employ Roma; foster awareness of their rights as citizens
- **Education**: ensure participation in all stages of education; eliminate segregation and misdiagnosis for placing in special needs schools; foster inclusive teaching; ensure parental and pupils involvement; fight bullying, provide training; invest in early childhood education and care; provide individualised support; prevent school dropout; encourage participation in higher education and non-formal learning and extracurricular activities; address the access to digital technologies by providing tools and connections as well as development of digital skills
- **Employment**: outreach of existing employment services; provide individual counseling; facilitate first work experience and transition to work; support acquisition of digital skills; foster continuous training; promote self-employment; use positive action and eliminate discrimination on the labour market
- **Healthcare and social services**: focus on women health and children care; hire health mediators; fight discrimination; prevent outbreaks in marginalised Roma localities; improve community and family-base services; prevent institutionalisation; exchange best practices
- **Housing and essential services**: ensure access to essential services; eliminate spatial segregation; support public authorities responsible for housing; prevent eviction; prevent exposure to pollution and contamination; ensure access to mainstream homelessness services and social housing; provide access to micro-loans and financial literacy; support halting sites for Travellers
- **Partnership**: with National Roma Contact Points (NRCP); with equality bodies; with local and regional stakeholders; with civil society

Member states should also dedicate budget for the implementation and monitoring of the frameworks. They should give adequate resources and mandate to national Roma contact points.

EU objectives and indicators

Each of the 7 areas (horizontal and sectoral) have a dedicated EU level objective and targets to be attained by 2030 called ‘headline targets’. These are complemented by minimum commitments for all member states. Additionally, member states with significant Roma populations are invited to set specific national targets and identify the relevant baseline to show their contribution to the European objectives.
1. Fight and prevent antigypsyism and discrimination

- Cut the proportion of Roma with discrimination experience by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 less than 13% of Roma experience discrimination
  - discrimination experience of Roma: 26% (past 12 months), 41% (past 5 years)

- Decrease the proportion of general population who feel uncomfortable having Roma neighbours by at least a third:
  - to ensure that by 2030 less than 30% feel uncomfortable having Roma neighbours
  - proportion of general population who feel uncomfortable having Roma neighbours: 46%

2. Reduce poverty and social exclusion to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population

- Cut poverty gap between Roma and general population by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 the majority of Roma escape poverty
  - 'at risk of poverty' rate: Roma 80%; general population 16.8% (gap: 63.2 pp)

- Cut poverty gap between Roma children and other children by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 the majority of Roma children escape poverty
  - Roma: children: 85%; children in general: 19.6% (gap: 65.4 pp)

3. Promote participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust

- Capacitate and engage at least 90 NGOs in EU-wide coordinated Roma civil society monitoring:
  - NGOs involved in Roma Civil Monitoring project: 85

- Encourage participation of Roma in political life at local, regional, national and EU levels:
  - to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of Roma victims report discrimination
  - proportion who reported last incident of discrimination they experienced (in any area) in last 5 years: 15%

- Ensure participation of Roma NGOs as full members in national monitoring committees for all programmes addressing needs of Roma communities

4. Increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education

- Cut gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 at least 70% of Roma children participate in pre-school
  - early childhood education and care participation (3+): Roma 42%; general population 92.2% (gap: 50.2 pp)

- Reduce gap in upper secondary completion by at least one third:
  - to ensure that by 2030 the majority of Roma youth complete at least upper secondary education
  - completed upper secondary or above: Roma 28%; general population 83.5% (gap: 55.5 pp)

- Work towards eliminating segregation by cutting at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools (in Member States with significant Roma population):
  - to ensure that by 2030 less than one in five Roma child attend schools where most or all children are Roma
  - Roma children attending schools where most or all children are Roma: 45%

5. Increase effective equal access to quality and sustainable employment

- Cut employment gap by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 at least 60% of Roma are in paid work
  - paid employment: Roma 43%; general population 71.1% (gap: 28.1 pp)

- Cut gender employment gap for Roma by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 at least 45% of Roma women are in paid work
  - gender employment gap - Roma: 29.7 pp (women: 29%, men: 56%); general population gap: 11.7 pp (women: 67.2%, men: 78.9%)

- Cut gap in NEET rate by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 less than one in three Roma youth is not in education, employment or training
  - NEET rate (16-24 years): Roma 62%; general population 10.1% (gap: 51.9 pp)

6. Improve Roma health and increase effective equal access to quality healthcare and social

- Cut life expectancy gap by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 Roma women and men live 5 years longer
  - life expectancy gap at birth (general population vs Roma): Roma women 10.4 years; Roma men 10.2 years

- Ensure that at least 95% of Roma have access to tap water:
  - to ensure that by 2030 the majority of Roma do not face housing deprivation
  - housing deprivation: Roma 61%; general population 17.9% (gap: 43.1 pp)

7. Increase effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services

- Cut gap in overcrowding by at least half:
  - to ensure that by 2030 the majority of Roma no longer live in overcrowded households
  - overcrowding: Roma 78%; general population 17.1% (gap: 60.9 pp)

- Ensure that at least 95% of Roma have access to tap water:
  - access to tap water in dwelling: Roma 70%, general population 97.7%
To complement the mandatory headline targets, a portfolio of indicators is proposed to further monitor the situation in the different countries. The indicators are both quantitative and qualitative and are used to evaluate the process (measures, interventions and actions implemented) and the results (changes in the situation on the ground). Several of these indicators aim at reporting action and measures taken at local level.

Data collection, monitoring and reporting

At national level:
- MS will report on the implementation of their framework every 2 years from 2023 onwards. The reports should be made public and be discussed in national parliaments.
- National Roma Contact Points will conduct a mid-term evaluation of the national strategic framework.
- Support such as capacity building will be provided by the Fundamental Rights Agency on data collection and reporting.

At European level:
- In 2022, the European Commission will evaluate national Roma strategic frameworks and provide guidance for improvement.
- The Commission will publish periodic monitoring reports every 2 years using FRA data, national reports and input from civil society.
- FRA will carry out regular Roma survey in 4-year cycles starting in 2020. These will be used as baseline, mid-term and end-term reports at EU level.
- The Commission will conduct mid-term and ex-post evaluations.

By civil society:
- The EU will provide capacity building to support a new cycle of coordinated independent civil monitoring and reporting based on the Roma civil monitor project 2017-2020. These will also take place in 2-years cycles starting from 2022.

EU funding

European funding from Next Generation EU, ESF+, ERDF and EADR can foster Roma inclusion. Yet it is up to the Member States to allocate funds based on their priorities for most of these funds. Earmarking has sometimes been included but not exclusively for Roma (for example on ESF+, 25% should be dedicated to social inclusion).

Invest EU can also be used though its social investment and skills window. The Commission will implement focused pilot initiatives to encourage the use of social impact bonds and blending with EU grants and financial instruments.

The citizens equality, rights and values programme will contribute to promote positive narratives and role models and raise awareness on Roma history and culture.
The 4 countries with the most important share of Roma people in their population\(^1\) (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary) should establish a **plan defining how EU and national funds will be invested for Roma**. They are also expected to specify how reforms will contribute to equality and inclusion.

**What’s in it for cities?**

A dedicated chapter to the role of cities and how to address Roma inclusion at local level\(^2\) is included in the draft proposal for the **Council recommendation**. Although not binding, this is the strongest political tool the EU has in the field of social policies to push member states to action, as binding legal frameworks are not applicable to EU social policy.

The draft Council recommendation calls for:

- **Involving local authorities** in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of national strategic framework
- Encouraging local authorities to **develop or update their local action or desegregation plans** or Roma strategic frameworks for equality, inclusion and participation. They recommend the inclusion of measures, baselines, benchmarks, measurable objectives and funding allocation
- **Cooperation** between central and local authorities in the design and implementation of EU funds relevant for preventing and tackling discrimination of the Roma
- Better **channelling of EU funds to the local level**
- Ensuring that Roma professionals are recruited by public institutions at local level
- Empowering and recognising the representation of Roma people at local level
- Encourage use of national and EU funds for capacity building and exchange of good practices with the local level
- “MS should **address funding needs of the local level**, including those of urban areas, in order to sustainably support EU mobile Roma, including by providing for language training, early childhood education and care, schooling, public employment services, social workers, mediators etc.”\(^3\)

According to our first analysis, all recommendations mentioned in Eurocities’ contribution to the post-2020 EU Roma framework were included! This is a great success in the advocacy work conducted over the last years.

**What next?**

The Council will negotiate and adopt the Council recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation. The discussions are expected to start under the German presidency of the Council (until December 2020) but are most likely going to continue during the Portuguese presidency.

In parallel, member states will start drafting their national strategic framework and should involve cities in the process.

\(^1\) Defined as countries where Roma represent well over 1% of the population (e.g. Bulgaria (9.94%), Romania (9.02%), Slovakia (8.63%) and Hungary (7.49%))

\(^2\) While the communication by the European Commission barely refers to the role of cities and the need to address Roma inclusion at local level.

\(^3\) Page 28
It will be of key importance for cities to act fast and early in this regard. Being engaged in the discussions with national authorities on the drafting of the national Roma strategies will give cities an opportunity to ensure that local needs and priorities are well reflected in the national strategies. You will also be able to highlight funding needs and monitoring needs, among others. It is also key to ensure sufficient flexibility to adapt the national strategic framework to the different local contexts and local Roma groups, including EU mobile Roma citizens.

Eurocities will continue to provide support and exchange of best practices for this purpose.

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