



Structural Funds: Investing in Roma

EURoma Position Paper as concerns future Regulations of the Structural Funds (2014-2020)

(Agreed on January 2011)

EURoma (*European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds* www.euromanet.eu) is an initiative launched in 2007 that gathers 12 EU Member States with the aim of promoting the use of the Structural Funds for the social inclusion of the Roma population. Network partners are represented by Managing Authorities and public bodies responsible for Roma policies. The primary aims of EURoma are the sharing of strategies, initiatives and approaches, mutual learning based on experience, knowledge generation and the dissemination and standardisation of such knowledge.



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INTRODUCTION

The present Position Paper aims to make a relevant and informed contribution to the current debate on the new Regulations, by making concrete proposals and identifying possible orientations on how, in light of EURoma's experience, EU financial instruments could have a more effective impact on the living conditions of the Roma population.

EURoma, as the *European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds* is committed to playing a leading role in promoting a more efficient and results-oriented use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion in the preparatory stage of next Regulations. EURoma can count on three years of experience in exchanging evidence of best practices and analysing advances, obstacles and challenges ahead. Since its creation, EURoma partners have discussed topics and issues, reflected on approaches and strategies, and agreed on proposals and recommendations concerning different aspects of the use of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion, through regular thematic seminars and workshops. EURoma has, therefore, achieved sufficient knowledge and experience to take an evidenced-based position regarding the future EU financial framework.

Roma inclusion has acquired political relevance on the European agenda in recent years. Thanks to the efforts of civil society organisations, several Member States, EU institutions and international organisations, awareness of the social, economic and political costs of Roma exclusion has increased significantly, and ever more coordinated efforts are being made to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Roma. Structural Funds in particular have become a key financial and policy instrument to target Roma needs.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Roma issues are increasingly present in the Operational Programmes of several Member States and that evidence is being generated on the extent to which Structural Funds are reaching Roma communities, there is a generalised conviction that the impact of existing actions is insufficient and that a widening gap is emerging between planning and implementation. Despite existing efforts, there are few indications that Roma living conditions are improving substantially.

Furthermore, there is an understanding that the global economic crisis is shaving off many of the advances made with regard to Roma inclusion in the past few years, while recent collective deportations of Roma in several EU Member States have highlighted the migratory patterns that unequal levels of economic development generate. Therefore, there is widespread consensus that despite significant achievements, Structural Funds have not fulfilled their potential and can be used even more effectively to bridge the gap between planning and implementation. The recent formation of the European Commission's high-level Task Force and its planned framework for the preparation of national programmes for Roma inclusion are expected to highlight the importance of, and give preponderance to the use of Community instruments, and particularly Structural Funds, for the reduction of inequalities between the majority population and Roma and for the fulfillment of the Europe 2020 objectives.

Roma issues are European issues, and the need for a coordinated European response to Roma needs enhances the relevance of Structural Funds. In general terms, most stakeholders highlight the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds as the main EU financial and policy instrument at the disposal of Member States to design and implement policies aimed at enhancing social cohesion and reducing inequalities within the EU. Structural Funds are therefore considered as a particularly relevant means of bridging the gap between the majority population and the Roma minority and to address transnational issues such as migration.



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All recent policy documents concerning Roma inclusion refer to Structural Funds as the key EU instrument to tackle Roma needs, i.e. the Council Conclusions on Advancing Roma Inclusion (7 June 2010); the EC Communication on “The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe” (7 April 2010); the Joint Statement by the Trio Presidency (9 April 2010); and the European Parliament Resolution on the Situation of Roma and on freedom of movement in the EU (9 September 2010).

EURoma is therefore determined to cooperate with EU institutions and Member States in order to ensure that the future Structural Funds Regulations will create the appropriate conditions to further improve the effectiveness of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion by applying in practice the Ten Common Basic Principles laid out in the Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion and endorsed by the European Council in 2009.

The present Position Paper provides key orientations along this line. The following proposals are the result of internal debates, most of them already reflected in the EURoma report “*Roma and the Structural Funds*” (April 2010), an analysis of available data in the 12 Network countries related to the use of the Structural Funds for the improvement of the Roma living conditions and the enhancement of Roma social inclusion. The report concludes that significant progress has been taking place during the 2007-2013 programming period in terms of volume of funds invested for Roma inclusion, as an explicit target group or among vulnerable groups, and in terms of substantial evidence-based results in a number of projects; however, many challenges remain and additional efforts are required in order to guarantee the effective impact of actions financed by Structural Funds for Roma inclusion.

This Position Paper is the first step of a broader EURoma agenda of activities to contribute to a more effective use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion in next programming period (2014-2020). EURoma will publish a practical guide with operational proposals for OPs planning, management and implementation beginning 2013.

This Paper is divided into three main topics, each of them including different aspects:

1. Strategic approach
2. Effectiveness
3. Management, monitoring and control systems



STRATEGIC APPROACH

1. Structural Funds should be fully aligned with the objectives and priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy

Considering that the Europe 2020 Strategy constitutes the new EU framework for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth over the next decade, the future Regulations should be designed as a key instrument to help deliver the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Regulations should also reflect the new policy directions of the EU 2020 Strategy, especially with regards to inclusive growth, and to specific Flagship Initiatives, such as the Platform against Poverty.

Structural Funds could make a great contribution to achieve the five EU2020 targets, three of which are of particular relevance as concerns Roma inclusion: reaching a 75% employment rate; increasing the educational levels by reducing to a maximum of 10% the proportion of early schools leavers and achieving a 40% rate of higher education degree among the younger generation; combating poverty by getting 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion. These are general objectives covering all EU citizens, but considering that Roma are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment and educational failure (especially in the case of Roma women), the Regulations should ensure that Structural Funds explicitly target the Roma population with a view to achieving these objectives.

2. Social inclusion as a horizontal priority

In accordance with the key priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth established by the Europe 2020 Strategy, social inclusion constitutes one of the EU's core policy priorities. Accordingly, the contribution of Structural Funds to social inclusion should be reinforced in the future financial framework. The future Regulations, which are intended to achieving a better thematic concentration, establishing a limited number of priorities, should be reprioritised by putting social inclusion at the forefront of Cohesion Policy in all EU regions (social exclusion affects equally rich and poor regions). In line also with the horizontal social clause of the Lisbon Treaty, social inclusion should then be considered a horizontal priority for all EU funds, not only the ESF.

3. Structural Funds should tackle the needs of the most disadvantaged groups

Understanding that the Structural Funds are the main EU financial instrument for social cohesion, the future Regulations should make sure that the Structural Funds have a particular focus on those groups affected disproportionately by social exclusion and discrimination, in particular the Roma population. The future Regulations and their implementation should not only have a more inclusive approach, but they should focus particularly on the fight against social inequalities and extreme poverty and to achieve equal opportunities for those groups most in need.

4. "Explicit but not exclusive" targeting of Roma

Evidence proves that general programmes usually fail to reach the Roma population. Targeted programmes are necessary whenever special circumstances force specific actions aimed at correcting disadvantages. Given that the Roma population is the most disadvantaged group in terms of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination within the EU, the future Regulations should explicitly refer to targeted actions towards Roma through an "explicit but not exclusive" approach. Principle n° 2 of the Common Basic Principles for



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Roma Inclusion¹ emphasises that programmes and policies which target Roma must not exclude members of other groups who share similar socioeconomic circumstances.

5. Mainstreaming of Roma inclusion

Measures to combat Roma exclusion need to be established within a wider framework of European and national policies and instruments available to mainstream society. The future Regulations should guarantee the mainstreaming of Roma inclusion issues into all relevant policy areas, specially those fields that are key to active inclusion of Roma (such as employment, education, health, housing, infrastructural or territorial development). Mainstreaming of Roma inclusion is also one of the 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion that ought to inform, where appropriate, the design and implementation of policies to promote the full inclusion of the Roma. Explicit Roma inclusion targets should be incorporated across all mainstream EU policy areas.

6. Integrated approach of actions

The complexity and interdependence of the problems affecting the Roma population requires integrated responses. The future Regulations should ensure that Structural Funds provide an appropriate framework for integrated and multidimensional actions addressing Roma exclusion. The ERDF Regulation already includes such an approach through the amendment of article 7.2, which now allows for integrated housing interventions for marginalised communities, in particular the Roma population, by introducing the requirement of “integrated approach of actions” as a condition for the allocation of funds. The future Regulations should provide the appropriate framework for an integrated approach of actions aiming at Roma inclusion.

7. Structural Funds will not contribute to segregation

The future Regulations should ensure that interventions financed by Structural Funds promote equal opportunities and tackle segregation. Explicit desegregation measures should be promoted and even considered as a key criterion for the access to Structural Funds. The before mentioned amendment of article 7.2 of the ERDF Regulation already introduces for the first time the requirements of “desegregation” along with an “integrated approach of actions” for the allocation of funds in housing interventions. Regulations should ensure that the Structural Funds will not contribute to segregation and, if possible, actively contribute to desegregation, not only in the field of housing interventions, but also in other fields covered by the Structural Funds such as education.

EFFECTIVENESS

8. Structural Funds aligned with national, regional and local policies and resources

Understanding that synergy of Structural Funds with national policies and strategies (i.e. National Reform Plans, Employment Strategy or National Roma Inclusion Strategies within the EU Framework) contributes to increase effectiveness, the future Regulations should reinforce the idea of the Structural Funds not only as mere financial instruments but as policy instruments, tools for policy change. Therefore, Regulations should emphasise the need for the Structural Funds to be aligned with national, regional and local policies. Horizontal as well as vertical coordination of Managing Authorities with different stakeholders should be enhanced at Regulations.

¹ The 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion established within the framework of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion are intended to guide public policies and projects for Roma.



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Structural Funds should not be only considered an opportunity for investing in Roma inclusion but also a tool for designing more effective long-term policies involving different actors in close coordination with national social and employment policies.

9. Increased involvement of local and regional authorities within a national framework

One of the main challenges when dealing with Roma inclusion is the involvement and commitment of stakeholders at the local level. Local and regional authorities are the best positioned to, and accountable for, provide concrete responses to Roma needs. Access to Structural Funds may be restricted in some cases due to lack of political interest from local and regional authorities; in other cases the latter may encounter certain constraints related to complex administrative procedures, co-financing requirements, lack of capacity, etc.

The future Regulations should guarantee and explicitly promote the access of municipalities to the Structural Funds. Providing appropriate support and expertise through technical assistance and capacity-building would facilitate local and regional involvement in the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion, which is an opportunity for combining action levels. Actions implemented concurrently at the national and local levels have proved to achieve a greater impact. Structural Funds become real policy instruments when actions implemented at the local level have a national strategic design.

10. Integrated use of EU Funds

To tackle the multidimensional challenges of Roma exclusion, interventions should have an intersectoral approach and the allocation of necessary resources, which would require an integrated use of EU Funds. Intensifying the coordination of the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD will surely contribute to increase effectiveness, to facilitate an integrated approach and to achieve the greater impact of actions financed by the funds (i.e. by concentrating and focusing on a given territory with specific needs). Regulations should explicitly reinforce the coordination and combined use of EU Funds, providing the mechanisms and instruments required for a more effective implementation of programmes and projects.

11. Long term approach

As concerns the durability of operations, a long-term approach is a prerequisite for and an opportunity within the framework of the Structural Funds. Real social transformations, especially in the case of Roma social inclusion, can only be achieved over the long-term; therefore, programmes should be planned over the full seven-year period. If the Structural Funds are to achieve real impact and improve the living conditions of the Roma population, the future Regulations should ensure that the implementing mechanisms of OPs fulfil the long-term approach needed for social inclusion interventions financed by Structural Funds.

12. Reinforcing public/private partnerships

Strong partnerships (in particular with NGOs and local authorities) contribute to a more efficient implementation of actions aimed at Roma inclusion. Regulations should reinforce the partnership principle and make sure that partners are involved at every stage of the process, from programming to evaluation. Active and responsible partnership requires a process of capacity-building within civil society and within local administrations. Technical Assistance together with Global Grants should be promoted as key instruments to consolidate and improve the outcomes of partnerships. Resources should not only be oriented to tackle Roma needs, but also to work on systems and institutions dealing with Roma and other vulnerable groups through institutional capacity-building.



MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND CONTROL SYSTEMS

13. Simplification of procedures

The complexity of administrative procedures and cofinancing rules and requirements are considered an obstacle for the management of Structural Funds. As already mentioned, local authorities and NGOs should play a more important role in the delivery of Structural Funds; the future Regulations should therefore simplify procedures in order to facilitate the access of those key actors to EU funding.

14. Refocusing evaluation systems: criteria based on results

Interventions funded by Structural Funds should be measured and evaluated in terms of real impacts rather than in terms of mere inputs. Member States, as well as regional and local authorities, should account for the results of investments that use Structural Funds. The effectiveness of interventions financed by Structural Funds should be strengthened in Regulations by establishing standard evaluation criteria based on impact and results, not only on fulfilment of financial control mechanisms. These criteria should allow for a mid-term as well as final evaluation to measure progress made and impact on target groups (Roma, migrants, etc.). Structural Funds indicators should be in line with those used to achieve the EU 2020 Strategy measuring social inclusion outcomes.

15. Increasing the monitoring role of the EC

Regulations should reinforce the monitoring role of the European Commission not only at the management and control procedures, but also at the level of evaluation of impact and results of interventions financed by Structural Funds. The future Regulations should endow the Commission with the responsibility of monitoring the extent to which Structural Funds intended to reach the Roma population actually reach them on the ground in Member States. Technical Assistance should be considered as a valuable tool to achieve this objective.

16. Roma inclusion and Roma involvement in the Monitoring Committees

The future Regulations should enhance the role of the Monitoring Committees to assess the impact of actions co-financed by Structural Funds on Roma inclusion, inviting Member States to report on the progress made to improve Roma social inclusion. The participation of civil society, and in particular Roma participation, in Monitoring Committees should be enhanced in the future Regulations.