



Structural Funds: Investing in Roma

**EURoma Position Paper on
The potential contribution of the Structural Funds
to National Roma Integration Strategies**

Agreed in October 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 objectives 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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Context

EURoma Network welcomes the new EU policy framework established by the European Commission through the Communication *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (5.4.2011). The European Commission established for the first time a common framework for the development of national policies and measures with approaches, goals and priority areas shared by all Member States aimed at the effective integration of Roma.

“With this EU Framework, the European Commission encourages Member States, in proportion to the size of the Roma population living in their territories and taking into account their different starting points, to adopt or to develop further a comprehensive approach to Roma integration (...).”

At its meeting on 23-24 June in Brussels, the European Council endorsed the Presidency’s report on Roma inclusion and called for the rapid implementation of the Council’s conclusions of 19 May on the *EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*. There has been a strong political commitment to Roma inclusion at the EU highest level and a clear leadership of the EU institutions in the definition of the policy framework urging Member States’ assumption of responsibility.

“This EU Framework seeks to make a tangible difference to Roma people’s lives. It is the EU’s response to the current situation and does not replace Member States’ primary responsibility in this regard.”

This new EU policy framework entails that *“Member States are requested to prepare or revise their national Roma integration strategies and present them to the Commission by the end of December 2011”*. These strategies should meet a number of common goals in four priority areas: access to education, employment, healthcare and housing. The minimum standards established by the EC Communication should be based on common, comparable and reliable indicators.

National Strategies’ goals should be fully aligned with the overall targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy; therefore, addressing the situation of Roma will contribute to progress towards Europe 2020 employment, social inclusion and education targets.

National Strategies (...) *“should fit into and contribute to the broader framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy and should therefore be consistent with national reform programmes.”*

“From its inception, Europe 2020 Strategy takes into account the situation of the Roma population. Actions to support the integration of the Roma will be part of the relevant financial instruments, in particular cohesion policy funds.”

As a Network focused on the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion, we strongly value the reference to the use of the EU funds made by the Communication. The Structural Funds have proved to be a key financial and political instrument to promote the social inclusion of



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the Roma populationⁱ; therefore, the Structural Funds, mainly ESF and ERDF, but also EARDF, could play a crucial role in the development of the National Strategies. This EURoma Position Paper provides some proposals to Member States on how the Structural Funds can contribute to the success of the National Roma Integration Strategies.

During the present programming period (2007-2013) an increasing number of EU Member States have made use of such resources to support and complement their respective national policies and measures to promote Roma inclusion. Even if national policies and resources are the basis for the development of the National Roma Integration Strategies, the Structural Funds will play a key role in this new stage by reinforcing national funds. This role has become even more important and necessary as a consequence of the current economic crisis, which implies strong constraints of national funding.

This new scenario implies an unprecedented opportunity to improve the situation of the Roma population through a better coordination of policies and measures at the EU level, the setting of common approaches towards Roma inclusion and the unification of criteria for evaluation of results in such a topic that, beyond the national implications, has a strong European component.

The political commitment showed by Member States in the European Council should be given coherence by taking the appropriate concrete steps not only in the elaboration of the National Roma Integration Strategies, but also in the definition of priorities and explicit mention of Roma in the new Regulations (2014-2020) currently taking place; now is the time to align both policy initiatives as a key contribution to achieving the *inclusive growth* priority of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The role and the added value of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion

When used efficiently, the Structural Funds have proved to be a key economic and political instrument for the social inclusion of the Roma population. Indeed, the Structural Funds are the main EU financial instrument at the disposal of the Member States to achieve social, territorial and economic cohesion; therefore, the fight against poverty and social exclusion of the Roma population is right at the core of the Structural Funds' objectives.

However, according to the EC Communication, *"most Member States currently do not make yet sufficient use of available EU funds to address the needs of the Roma"*.

ⁱ According to the EC Communication on the *EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, "(...) the Commission recalls that up to €26.5 billion of EU funding is currently programmed to support Member States' efforts in the field of social inclusion, including to support efforts to help the Roma. For the ESF, €9.6 billion have been allocated in the period 2007-2013 for measures targeting socio-economic inclusion of disadvantaged people - among them marginalised Roma- and €172 million have been explicitly allocated for actions aiming at integrating the Roma. In the case of the ERDF, more than € 16.8 billion are planned for social infrastructure".



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The findings of the Roma Task Force, established by the European Commission in September 2010 to assess Member States' use of EU funds, as well as the 2010 EURoma Report on "Roma and the Structural Funds", provide valuable knowledge of the current state of play and identify the key advantages and shortcomings of the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion, which should serve as a starting-point for future developments.

The EURoma Report concludes that significant progress has been taking place in the past decade, and shows the considerable increase in the volume of funds invested in projects which benefit directly or indirectly the Roma or directly targeting their needs within the 2007-2013 programming period; the report highlights the added value of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion in terms of extensive financial support and long-term planning, offering the opportunity to target the most excluded groups, linking social inclusion with employment measures and combining action levels at the local and national levels.

However, there are still many challenges as well as a number of areas in which there is a need to make further efforts to continue the advances made. EURoma identified a series of challenges in the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion related to four main areas:

- ✓ Inadequate design of projects: lack of targeted and results-oriented approach, short-term projects without strategic perspective, scarce knowledge about Roma needs and lack of consultation process;
- ✓ Managing models and implementation bottlenecks: mainly linked with complex and rigid administrative procedures, co-finance requirements and low technical capacity levels;
- ✓ Coordination mechanisms: limited vertical and horizontal coordination in terms of planning and implementation and lack of synergy with other national and EU resources.
- ✓ Lack of disaggregated data and evaluation of projects: difficulties to measure achievements and to assess impact of projects.

According to the findings of the EURoma Report, Structural Funds invested in Roma projects have proved to be more effective and successful when:

- ✓ They are aligned with national, regional and local policies and resources, and strong horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms exist;
- ✓ They have a targeted approach, without excluding other vulnerable groups;
- ✓ They guarantee strong partnerships involving key public and private stakeholders in all project stages (starting from the design to evaluation), including consultations with members of the Roma population;
- ✓ They promote long-term, sustainable projects that provide measurable results;
- ✓ They are managed from an intercultural perspective by qualified professionals and experienced organizations with technical and administrative capacity.

These general lessons should be taken into consideration when elaborating the National Strategies for Roma Inclusion.



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The potential contribution of the Structural Funds to National Roma Integration Strategies: Concrete proposals

The EURoma Network is willing to contribute with its experience and know-how to the new stage opened by the elaboration and implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies.

National Strategies are expected to set achievable national goals covering at least the four crucial areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing; to include a clear action plan identifying concrete measures, accompanied by a corresponding time schedule and adequate funding, indicating the national or EU sources; to be designed, implemented and monitored in close cooperation and continuous dialogue with key stakeholders; and to include strong monitoring methods to evaluate the impact of actions aimed at Roma integration.

In this framework, the Structural Funds will contribute to achieve the goals established for the National Roma Integration Strategies if:

1. **Managing Authorities incorporate the priorities and goals of the National Roma Integration Strategies to the programming, or reprogramming, of the current and future Operational Programmes (OPs)**, ensuring that they are accessible to Roma and that their eligibility criteria are in line with the National Strategies in terms of approaches and priorities:
 - i. OPs eligibility criteria should be in compliance with the *10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion*, such as the explicit but not exclusive targeting, mainstreaming of the Roma inclusion, non-discriminatory/segregated actions, intercultural approach, involvement of local and regional administrations, as well as civil society and Roma participation.
 - ii. OPs eligibility criteria should prioritise projects focus on the 4 areas established in the National Roma Integration Strategies: education, employment, healthcare and housing, and specially those promoting an integrated and desegregated approach to Roma inclusion. The potential offered by the ERDF art. 7.2 for integrated projects based on housing interventions linked with employment, education and healthcare measures is a great opportunity to combine ESF and ERDF resources that is been underused.
 - iii. OPs should be results-oriented and set clear indicators that allow for better monitoring and evaluation. The focus should be on meaningful outcomes rather than on the fulfillment of administrative requirements.

The EC Communication invites Member States to amend their OPs to better support Roma targeted projects and explicitly commits to swiftly examining requests for programme modifications. Given the current low level of expenditure of some OPs, there is still room for amendments in this sense.

“The Commission will examine with Member States changes to their operational programmes in order to address new needs, simplify delivery and speed up the implementation of priorities, including the use of the housing-related integrated approach foreseen in the ERDF modified Regulation. The



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Commission will swiftly examine requests for programme modifications that are in relation to the national Roma integration strategies.”

In addition, for the next programming period (2014-2020), whose Regulations are now under negotiation, Managing Authorities should mainstream the Roma inclusion through all OPs related to Roma needs, ensure that investment priorities are aligned with National Strategies’ goals and simplify procedures. The Commission, from its side,

“When preparing its proposals for the future cohesion policy regulatory framework (...) will strive to address the current potential barriers to an effective use of cohesion policy funds to support Roma integration.”

2. Managing Authorities work in close cooperation with public bodies responsible for National Strategies for Roma Inclusion from the very beginning and in all stages of the process. Managing Authorities should be involved in the elaboration and implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies from the design to the evaluation stages. National Strategies are supposed to gather key actors related to Roma inclusion (public administrations at different levels, NGOs, etc.) around common principles and a common project; Managing Authorities should be part of this process in each Member State, so that we ensure that the Structural Funds are present during the whole development of the National Strategies (design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation).

- i. Managing Authorities should be consulted in the design of the National Roma Integration Strategies, so that they are committed to its goals from the very beginning, incorporate the priorities and goals to OPs and contribute to the elaboration of the Strategy;
- ii. Managing Authorities should be part of the monitoring mechanisms created for the development of the National Roma Integration Strategies and participate regularly in the monitoring process, contributing with its own results to the achievement of National Strategies’ goals, based on common, comparable and reliable indicators, and making sure that resources allocated to Roma inclusion reach indeed Roma population and are used efficiently.
- iii. OPs Monitoring Committees should incorporate the Roma inclusion as a cross-cutting issue to be assessed and invite Intermediary Bodies to report on their contribution to achieve National Strategies’ goals.

3. Managing Authorities incorporate Roma inclusion as a key objective of the Technical Assistance, reorienting current and future TA funds to support and facilitate Roma-targeted projects. The EC Communication has a clear message:

“There are significant amounts of EU technical assistance at MS’ disposal (4% of all Structural Funds), out of which Member States on average had only used 31% of their planned allocations until late 2009. These amounts would be lost if not used. When designing their national Roma integration strategies, MS should therefore make a greater use of EU technical assistance to improve their



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management, monitoring and evaluation capacities also with regard to Roma-targeted projects”.

In practical terms, Technical Assistance could be used for:

- i. Capacity-building. To ensure and facilitate the access to Structural Funds of those actors better positioned to work efficiently for Roma inclusion, but lacking administrative or technical capacity to manage Structural Funds (such as NGOs, local and regional authorities).
- ii. Better knowledge of the situation of the Roma population. Technical Assistance could be used to promote research and analysis for generating knowledge about the real living conditions of the Roma population, so that projects design and planning would be based on rigorous data.
- iii. Advancement of funds. To support the initial stages of the project implementation (including the managerial and technical design). The preparation of some complex and integrated projects, such as projects under the art.7.2 (ERDF) related to housing interventions, require a strong resource and time consuming effort from applicants even before the project submission, which sometimes discourages potential applicants. Technical Assistance could support these initial stages of projects that prove to be in line with priorities and goals of the National Strategies.
- iv. Mutual learning and active transferability of good practices. Actions under the National Roma Integration Strategies could be improved in terms of adequate approaches, results-oriented methodologies, etc. when reinforced by national and transnational exchange of experiences, mutual learning, peer activities, participation in related networks (such as EUroma). Technical Assistance could even support, as one step further, the active transferability of proved good practices.

To sum up, Structural Funds constitute a powerful instrument for social inclusion of the Roma population. They can contribute in achieving the National Roma Integration Strategies' goals by offering extensive financial support in a long-term perspective and an opportunity for an integrated and targeted approach of projects, by promoting partnership and combination of local and national action levels, by providing with resources for capacity-building and better knowledge of the Roma situation, etc.



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