

# Proposals for an EU Framework for Roma equality and inclusion post-2020

January 2020

Launched in 2007, EURoma (European Network on Roma inclusion under ESI Funds) brings together public authorities responsible for Roma policies and those responsible for ESI Funds from fifteen European Union (EU) Member States (MS) as well as the European Commission (EC). It aims to improve (through mutual learning, generation of knowledge and awareness-raising activities) the use of ESI Funds for the promotion of social inclusion, equal opportunities and fight against discrimination of the Roma community across the EU. The Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), as Technical Secretariat, leads and coordinates the Network.

This document is a revised version of the position paper released by EURoma Network in November 2017.

## Background

EURoma would like to share its views and proposals regarding a potential EU Framework for Roma equality and inclusion once the current EU Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies (NRIS) ends in 2020.

This document builds upon EURoma partners' experience as well as the reflection processes that have taken place within the Network over the last years on this topic. EURoma discussions and proposals have been reflected in different documents<sup>1</sup> and shared with the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders in the context of the different initiatives organised to reflect on the future of the current EU Framework.

### I. WHY A RENEWED EU FRAMEWORK POST-2020 IS NECESSARY?

EURoma calls for the maintenance of an EU policy initiative focusing specifically on Roma equality and inclusion and in particular for the continuation, with certain reforms, of the current EU Framework in the post-2020 period.

While it is true that the current EU Framework has not translated into widespread tangible changes for the large share of European Roma that still suffer from poverty, exclusion, inequalities and discrimination and cannot fully enjoy their fundamental rights on an equal footing with others, it has triggered a process of change that, if maintained over time, should contribute to promoting the social inclusion, equal opportunities and non-discrimination of the Roma community.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example EURoma's contribution to the European Commission's mid-term review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) <https://www.euromanet.eu/featured-publications/euroma-contribution-to-the-midterm-review-of-eu-framework-on-national-roma-integration-strategies/>

The EU Framework has put Roma inclusion on the agenda at European and national level, fostering the political commitment of relevant authorities and the mobilisation of other relevant actors and boosting instruments and structures to implement the NRIS resulting from it, notably the National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs). In addition, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds), mainly the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) but also the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), have been widely recognised as key financial and political instruments to promote Roma inclusion and to develop the NRIS, representing an unprecedented opportunity to foster the alignment between the financial and the policy side and encouraging the connection between the bodies in charge of the Roma policies (NRCPs) and of the financial resources (ESI Funds Managing Authorities).

However, the timeframe of the current EU Framework has not been long enough to address the situation of Roma and to reduce the existing gaps with the majority population, but just to set the general framework for action and kick-off the process of change. Further and sustained efforts are still needed to maximise the opportunities offered by the existence of an EU Framework targeting specifically Roma population and of EU financial resources (notably ESI Funds) that can contribute to achieve its goals.

Therefore, the importance of maintaining, consolidating and strengthening an EU Framework aimed at Roma equality and inclusion beyond 2020, building upon the progress and achievements made and the experience gained over the last years. The future EU Framework would contribute to maintaining Roma inclusion as a European/national concern and visualising the situation of clear disadvantaged and inequality faced by Roma across the EU. As a result, it would guide public policy attention to this issue and therefore policy priorities and investments (through targeted interventions and/or mainstream policies).

## II. HOW SHOULD THE FUTURE EU FRAMEWORK BE REFORMED?

As already stated, EURoma supports the continuation of a post-EU Framework aimed at Roma equality and inclusion but with certain reforms that take into account the lessons learnt during the implementation of the current EU Framework (achievements and challenges) as well as the changes that have taken place in the social and political context since its adoption in 2011.

The **future EU Framework and National Strategies should be considered as key instruments to promote social change**. They offer policy frameworks (at European and national level) that specifically address Roma equality and inclusion over a period covering several years, which allows for the planning and implementation of sustained and solid interventions (targeted and mainstream) with the potential of achieving a real impact on the lives of Roma. Therefore the future EU Framework/National Strategies should be used as planning tools in which it is clearly stated how the goals set will be translated into practice (measures foreseen, connection to other sectoral policies, actors involved, financial resources...) and the tools to measure their achievement (expected targets, measurable indicators...).

1. The **connection between the policy measures foreseen and the funding instruments (at EU and national level)** is essential to ensure more efficient social change instruments. National Strategies should clearly specify the financial resources foreseen for the achievement of the goals set, addressing one of the weaknesses of the current period (no specific budget allocated to the implementation of the NRIS in most countries). As further developed in section III, this is particularly relevant for the **ESI Funds**.
2. An essential aspect to improve the impact of the EU Framework/National Strategies is **to strengthen the mechanisms of governance** in place at European and national level. In particular, as stated in the EC mid-term evaluation, the **mandate, institutional capacity and resources of the National Roma Contact Points**. They should have a pivotal role to make progress. To this end, they should be endowed with the adequate human and financial resources as well as the competences (capacities and mandate) necessary to fulfil the tasks assigned to them at coordination and political level. In general terms, there seems to be an imbalance between the responsibilities assigned and the capacity to fulfil them. The capacity to mobilise actors in charge of mainstream policies and to align ESI Funds and Roma policies is particularly relevant.
3. The **ownership of the NRIS at all administrative levels (national, regional and local)** is essential to guarantee its effective implementation and impact. To this end, the alignment, complementarity and coordination between the different levels should be considered since the planning phase with specific measures to support, activate and monitor their commitment.

A certain degree of **flexibility** of the EU Framework to adapt to the economic and social realities of each country as well as to the different contexts within each country (e.g. the role of the regional level in countries) could contribute to achieve this goal.

Particular attention should be paid to the **local level**, and in particular to the resistances of many local authorities to implement actions targeting Roma, which has been one of the key challenges of the current period.

4. Interventions in the **four priority areas of the current EU Framework (employment, education, health and housing)** should remain at the core, and be strengthened, as they are crucial to ensure that Roma can fully enjoy their fundamental rights on an equal footing with others. Alongside these fields, particular attention should be given to other that have not been widely or specifically addressed in the current Framework, notably the **fight against discrimination and the gender perspective, together with the consideration of social services/social protection**. Specific measures and indicators should be foreseen in these fields.
5. Intensity in **terms of length, continuity, scale and resources** as well as a **holistic approach in terms of types of actions, funds and actors involved** are fundamental for interventions to have a real impact in the Roma population and in society as a whole.

6. A **dual strategy** combining **target measures** (necessary to address the situation of disadvantage of the Roma population and the existing gaps between Roma and the majority population), and a **mainstreaming approach** that considers how to make each of the policy areas of relevance for Roma inclusion inclusive with the Roma population is important. Both types of measures should be explicitly included in the planning and monitoring tools, with specific objectives, measures and indicators, as well as the budget allocated.
7. The **diversity of the Roma population and the specific needs of each of the subgroups** (e.g. women, EU-mobile Roma, youth, children...) should be specifically considered, including with specific measures, objectives and indicators. A **child-focused approach** would be very much needed.
8. In addition to the public-public partnership, there should be a promotion of the **quality participation, involvement and performance of all relevant stakeholders for Roma inclusion**. These include Roma NGOs and organisations working to promote Roma inclusion as well as Roma communities themselves...To this end, further attention and support should be given to the **capacity-building** of all actors involved in the management and implementation of the EU Framework NRIS (NRCPs but also other relevant public and private actors).
9. **Transnational exchanges and cooperation (both bilateral and multilateral) between countries/regions** (on Roma inclusion in general and on the implementation of the National Strategies in particular) should be further promoted and supported in the context of the future EU Framework and National Strategies as an effective way to advance in social cohesion. European Commission's Roma Unit could have a leading role in this sense. ESI Funds, in particular ESF+, could play a key role in supporting this transnational dimension.
10. **Monitoring and reporting systems should be further developed and strengthened** in order to count on reliable data that allow monitoring implementation, achievements and efficiency of the Framework. These systems should include information on explicit targeted actions and actions to promote more inclusive mainstream policies as well as data related to the main regulatory frameworks and to all initiatives/programmes.  
  
Promoting **disaggregation on ethnic origin** is another crucial aspect. Although it may be challenging in some cases, there are legal safeguards that guarantee data protection, as experience of some countries have demonstrated.
11. Roma inclusion goals should be connected with **key EU and international policy efforts of relevance for Roma inclusion**, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Child Guarantee for Vulnerable Children, the Digital Agenda and the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

### III. HOW TO BEST CONNECT THE EU FRAMEWORK/NRIS WITH ESI FUNDS?

**ESI Funds are key financial and political instruments to promote Roma inclusion and to meet the objectives of the future EU Framework and National Strategies. They are guided by principles (such as the large-scale and long-term) that allow developing interventions that, if implemented effectively, can have a real impact on Roma inclusion.**

Therefore, it is essential to maintain the recognition of the role of ESI Funds (mainly ESF+ and ERDF-Cohesion Fund but also other funds) in the post-2020 EU Framework/National Strategies and to reinforce the alignment, complementarity and coordination between these two instruments, connecting the financial and the policy sides. This connection is key to ensure that Roma inclusion is considered in the future ESI Funds framework to a wide extent in terms of scope (national and regional OPs), funds (ESF+, ERDF-Cohesion Fund or others), specific objectives (beyond the dedicated ones), approaches (explicit mention, no mention, territorial approaches), hierarchical importance and fields of intervention. The coincidence of the current planning of both the future EU Framework for Roma equality and inclusion and the future ESI Funds Regulations offer a lot of opportunities to promote this connection since the very beginning.

12. **National Strategies should clearly specify how ESI Funds will contribute to the achievement of the goals** set and the implementation of the interventions foreseen, together with other EU, national, regional and local resources. This include both the target interventions as well as the mainstream measures aimed to promote more inclusive policies/initiatives.

Exploring the possibility to combine ESI Funds with **other financial resources** (national or EU), as a complement and to promote sustainability of investments once they are finished (criteria of additionality and sustainability), is also important.

13. In turn, **ESI Funds should be fully aligned with the goals of the future EU Framework/National Strategies**, prompting this way the availability of financial resources to support their achievement. To this end, efforts should be made to raise awareness of relevant ESI Funds authorities on the importance of considering the future **EU Framework/National Strategies as an integral part of the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these funds** and to support them in translating this into practice by, for example:

- Considering and explicitly referring to the future EU Framework/National Strategies in all **regulatory documents related to ESI Funds, both at European and national level.**
  - **Common Provisions Regulations.** The enabling condition ‘National Roma Integration Strategy’ related to ESF+ objective 4.3.2 (Promoting socio-economic integration of marginalised

communities such as the Roma) is a crucial element that could serve to promote structural changes as regards Roma inclusion and could be extended to other funds.

- **Regulations of ESI Funds of relevance for Roma inclusion**, with particular attention to funds beyond ESF+ (ERDF-Cohesion Fund others). As regards the ERDF-Cohesion Fund, while the economic, environmental and climate dimensions are important, the potential of these funds to address the social challenges facing EU urban and rural areas should not be disregarded.
  - **Operational Programmes**. Those Operational Programmes (at national and regional level) that could be of relevance for Roma inclusion should be fully linked with the objectives of the National Strategies.
- Reflecting in the planning, implementation and monitoring of ESI Funds those **criteria that have proven key to have an impact on Roma inclusion**: long-term approach, large scale, intensity, combination of target and mainstream measures, integrated approach, combination of hard and soft measures...
  - Allocating **specific funds** for interventions that could contribute **to the effective implementation of the future EU Framework/National Strategies** such as capacity-building of relevant stakeholders, running of the National Roma Contact Point or support to its activities...
14. The **alignment, complementarity and coordination between EU Framework/National Strategies and ESI Funds** should take place at **all levels (European, national, regional and local level) and within all policy, legal or financial instruments that could be of relevance for Roma inclusion** (beyond those specifically targeting Roma). A shared commitment and ownership of the EU Framework and the National Strategies is crucial to ensure the connection with mainstream policy legal and financial instruments (across areas such as housing, education, employment...).

At **regional level**, further efforts are still necessary to connect the regional financial instruments (regional operational programmes) with the National Strategies or, whenever there is, the policies and strategies developed at regional level (e.g. regional strategies).

At **local level**, it is necessary to continue supporting local authorities' capacity building with various EU instruments, providing mentoring, trainings, seminars, study visits...

15. The **ongoing connection between the bodies in charge of Roma policies** (notably NRCs) and **those responsible of the financial resources** (ESI Funds coordination structures, Managing Authorities, delegated Intermediate Bodies/Implementing Authorities...) is crucial.

In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that the **persons working in the negotiation and programming of the post-2020 ESI Funds framework** are fully aware of the existence of the current EU Framework for NRIS and of the plans for the post-2020 EU Framework so that they can take them

into account in their work. The **participation of the bodies in charge of Roma policies** in the discussions on the future ESI Funds framework should also be promoted, building upon the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP). This should happen at European level (Multiannual Financial Framework, Common Provisions Regulations, Regulations of relevant funds...) as well as at national level (Operational Programmes at European and national level).

16. It is important to acknowledge, take full advantage and support the **existing instruments to create and consolidate the alignment** between political and financial resources and the connection between the bodies in charge of Roma policies and those responsible of the financial resources, such as the EURoma Network.

17. In this sense, further emphasis should be given to the support of **transnational cooperation focused on the most disadvantaged groups such as Roma**. The provision of support for the active transfer of existing positive practices to other EU contexts could be combined with the establishment of cooperation mechanisms.

Finally, we acknowledge that the **proposals on the ESI Funds Regulations** put forward by the European Commission and the subsequent amendments proposed by the European Parliament and the European Council, notably those of ESF+ and ERDF-Cohesion Fund, include a wide range of elements that should contribute to connecting ESI Funds and Roma policies and to achieving a more social Europe and advancing on equality, social inclusion and non-discrimination of the Roma population across the EU after 2020. We call on relevant actors to support these elements so that they are maintained in the final Regulations<sup>2</sup>.

Once the future ESI Funds framework is adopted, it is important to **ensure the effective implementation of the actions planned in the programming documents** (both target and mainstreaming), ensuring that they actually reach Roma and have an impact on their lives. Those actions that do not target Roma explicitly or target them from explicit but not exclusive approaches should also be carefully monitored to avoid that Roma are disregarded or blurred among the many other groups. It is important to gather evidence on the impact that the funds have on Roma.

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<sup>2</sup> See EURoma's position paper 'How the future 2021-2027 European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) can better contribute to Roma inclusion and equality' <https://www.euromanet.eu/publications/euroma-pub/euromas-recommendations-on-future-esf-regulation/>