

REFERENCE PAPER

Why an explicit mention to the Roma community in the ESF+ Regulation Proposal is necessary

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 as well as the European Commission. 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 explicit mention to Roma under one of the Specific Objectives of the ESF+ Regulation Proposal (Article 4) '(viii) promoting socio-economic integration of third country nationals and of marginalised communities such as the Roma' is a straightforward acknowledgement of the need for ESF+ to specifically address the unequal situation that Roma face across the EU, giving continuation to the introduction of the specific Investment Priority (I.P.) 9.2. on the 'Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma' in the current 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) Regulations. The proposal for maintenance of the specific focus on Roma inclusion for the next programming period reflects the need to reinforce the efforts due to limited progress in the reduction of the equality gaps between Roma and non-Roma in EU Member states. The establishment of Enabling Conditions (the existence of a policy framework, namely National Roma Integration Strategies) to guide ESF+ investments around policy priorities is another essential element.

Historical persistence and chronification of discrimination against Roma and of inequality gaps between Roma citizens across the EU, together with the scarce positive impact of mainstream policies to tackle such uneven situation in the last decades, made the EU institutions consider the situation of Roma as a European concern and the need to set up new conditions to move forward and boost more and better investments to address the situation of Roma.

The first and necessary step has been the acknowledgement of the need to explicitly mention Roma as part of marginalised groups. The explicit mention to Roma is considered a necessary condition (although not sufficient) for increasing efforts in tackling the inequality suffered by Roma as it signals Member States (and also regions and local governments) the need to focus on them. There is historical evidence that when

Roma are not explicitly named and are considered within overall conception of marginalised groups, they are very likely left aside. The explicit, but not exclusively mention to Roma in policy and financial instruments visualizes their specific situation and guides the focus of public investments. Roma inclusion needs of further and more intense efforts, both from targeting and mainstream approaches. The explicit mention becomes a hook and allow both for targeted interventions and/or for mainstream policies (that understand the need to become inclusive with Roma too and establish the mechanisms to do so). If they are left invisible, they will not be acknowledged and will not be subject of public policy attention and therefore of policy investments. Previous decades have shown this is not the way forward.

The current explicit mention to Roma both in one the most relevant EU financial instruments for social cohesion (I.P. 9.2 in ESF Regulation 2014-2020) and in the EU policy framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2010-2020 have been milestones of such determination. The Roma have been placed in the EU political agenda and as a trigger effect, in the national, regional and local agendas too. As a result of the inclusion of the explicit mention to Roma in both the EU financial and policy frameworks, investment on Roma inclusion have been increased and improved in the current programming period.

Therefore, the specific mention to Roma within the future ESF+ Regulation is certainly a necessary (although not sufficient) requisite for stimulating Members States (and regions and local authorities) to consider the particular unequal situation of Roma and focus their investments. Giving for granted Roma will be part of investments for marginalised groups will, in some possible cases, reduce or even avoid further investments on Roma inclusion in some Members States. It would allow the loss of political commitment towards Roma.

Keeping the explicit mention to Roma in the current ESF+ Regulation proposal would, not only show the coherence of EU financial tools with the existing EU policy commitments (EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies) but would also enable social investments to make significant steps towards social change, real equality and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU.

The EU made an important step forward that should not be reversed if real social change is desired for the European Roma citizens. A social change that benefits society as a whole.