

EUROMA CONTRIBUTION

Assessment of the mid-term review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020

February 2018

EU Roma (*European Network on Roma inclusion under ESI Funds*) is an initiative launched in 2007 that gathers 15 EU Member States with the aim of promoting an effective use of the ESI Funds to achieve social inclusion, equal opportunities and non-discrimination of Roma. Network partners are represented by public authorities responsible for Roma policies and those responsible for ESI Funds, who share strategies, initiatives and approaches through mutual learning, and knowledge generation and dissemination. The network has renovated its commitment for the current programming period 2014-2020

BACKGROUND

In 2011, EURoma Network welcomed the EU policy framework established by the European Commission through the Communication “An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) up to 2020”. 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. It was indeed the first EU common effort to reduce inequalities and discrimination of Roma across the EU.

“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 (...)”.

This EU policy framework requested Member States “to prepare or revise their national Roma integration strategies and present them to the Commission by the end of December 2011”, having to meet a number of common goals in four priority areas considered essential to achieve social inclusion and social change: access to education, employment, healthcare and housing. The EC Communication importantly established how minimum standards should be based on common, comparable and reliable indicators.

The EU framework also underlines how National Strategies' goals had to be fully aligned with the overall targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy; addressing the situation of Roma would 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."

Alongside, the EU framework explicitly mentions the need to link the implementation of the NRIS with ESI funds (previously, Structural Funds).

"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."

After 5 years of implementation of the EU Framework, the EC has launched two midterm assessment processes to gather the view of various stakeholders as regards the EU policy, legal and funding instruments as well as national Roma NRIS and measures and policies, legal and funding tools relevant for Roma inclusion.

The results of the first consultation process have been included in the last EC Communication on the Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies (COM 2017) 458) launched the 30th August 2017. The results of the second consultation are still being processed and will be published in 2018.

EUROMA CONTRIBUTION TO THE MIDTERM REVIEW OF EU FRAMEWORK ON NATIONAL ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

EURoma contributed to these consultations processes as one of the key European actors regarding ESI Funds and Roma inclusion. The COM (2017) 458) includes several of the contributions made by EURoma, which are the result of ongoing internal debates with the network.

Most important achievements of the EU framework 2011-2020

- The political commitment to Roma inclusion (both at European level and national level) with the establishment, for the first time, of a common framework for the development of national policies, goals, priority areas, measures and approaches, shared by all Member states. Highlighting how Roma inclusion was (and is) a European concern has certainly helped to increase the efforts to overcome the unequal situation that Roma suffer across the EU.

- The wide recognition of ESI Funds (mainly ESF and ERDF, but also EAFRD) as key financial and political instrument to promote Roma inclusion and to develop NRIS, and therefore, the need to connect and coordinate these funds with NRIS. This implied an unprecedented opportunity to foster the alignment between these financial resources and national strategies, encouraging the connection between the bodies in charge of Roma policies (National Roma Contact Points) and of the financial resources (ESI Funds Managing Authorities). We believe EURoma has largely contributed to the creation and consolidation of these links and therefore to the improved alignment between political and financial tools.
- ESI Funds Regulations have created an increasing favourable framework of opportunities and tools to promote social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma across the EU. In particular, the 2014-2020 programming period has meant a tangible step forward with elements such as:
 - The introduction of the specific ESF Investment Priority ‘Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma’ (IP 9.2.), the ex-ante conditionalities (e.g. a national Roma strategic policy framework in place...) and the stronger linkages with the political priorities identified in the Country-Specific Recommendations.
 - In addition, in this period, a growing attention is given to Roma inclusion, as reflected by the fact that Roma population and Roma communities are targeted to a large extent and in a broad number of Operational Programmes, using a wide variety of options in terms of scope (national or regional OPs), funds (European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund or others), thematic objectives and investment priorities (9.2. or others), approaches (explicit mention, no mention and territorial approaches), hierarchical importance given to actions targeting Roma (at the level of priority axes, specific objectives or actions) and fields of intervention.

Most important challenges to be addressed in the future

- To achieve real change in the lives of many European Roma that still suffer from poverty, exclusion, inequalities and discrimination and cannot fully exercise, on an equal footing with other citizens, their citizenship (including full enjoyment of fundamental rights such as education or equal treatment). The existence of a political framework and financial instruments to promote Roma inclusion has not necessarily translated into widespread tangible changes for Roma and the reduction of the gaps between Roma and the majority population. Therefore, further efforts need to be in place to achieve real change in the lives of the European Roma.
- To maximize the opportunities offered by ESI Funds in the current programming period 2014-2020 to promote Roma inclusion. Indeed, current ESI funds regulations open an

unprecedented opportunity that should not be missed by:

- Making use of the whole wide range of possibilities offered, through the use of ESF Investment priority 9.2. and beyond, to achieve Roma inclusion in compliance with the objectives of the NRIS.
 - Ensure the effective implementation of the actions planned in the programming documents, ensuring that they actually reach Roma. Particular attention should be paid to the use of new/less common funds for Roma inclusion (ERDF, EAFRD or others). 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.
- Promoting an integrated approach.
- Using the combination of funds.
- Mainstreaming Roma inclusion in ESI funds beyond ESF.
- Fostering the alignment, complementarity and coordination between the NRIS and ESI Funds and among other key policies and administrative levels. To ensure that the implementation of the EU policy, legal and financial frameworks/instruments is assumed by all relevant actors and in particular by the different levels (notably the regional and local levels...). This assumption of responsibilities should also be considered at horizontal level.
 - At national level, the implementation of the EU framework and the NRIS should not only be assumed by those actors in charge of the policy, legal or financial instruments targeting specifically Roma, but by all actors in charge of instruments which could be of relevance for Roma inclusion. This co-responsibility would prompt an increased alignment between the Strategy and the mainstream policies (across areas such as housing, education, employment...).
 - Regional level. Further efforts are still necessary to connect the regional financial instruments (regional operational programmes) with the framework and objectives of national NRIS and, if any, of the policies and strategies developed for their translation into the regional level (e.g. regional strategies).
 - Local level. Continue to support local authorities' capacity building with various EU instruments, providing mentoring, trainings, seminars, study visits, etc.

National Contact Points 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 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.

- To achieve quality participation, involvement and performance of relevant stakeholders for Roma inclusion (including Roma NGOs and organisations working to promote Roma inclusion as well as Roma communities themselves). To this end, it is important:
 - To advance towards structured mechanisms to involve stakeholders and establish processes and methods that allow for an active and quality partnership (going beyond mere informative sessions and moving towards real consultation and partnership), to develop mechanisms for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of stakeholder involvement and to foster the capacity of stakeholders to get involved.
 - To promote a quality performance of actors involved as regards core aspects for the effective implementation of Roma inclusion programmes.
 - The possibilities to use ESI Funds Technical Assistance as financial resources to this end should be considered.

Finally, the European Commission has a key role to play in driving progress in all these areas by strengthening monitoring of compliance, providing guidance and support and encouraging alignment between policies at European level.

Overall, and in order to address all these challenges from now until 2020 EU and national authorities should recall about the political commitment acquired and ensure the effective implementation of the actions planned at policy, legal and funding level. A robust and continuous monitoring system would allow to revise the goals set and overcome the remaining gaps until 2020.