

SNAPSHOT OF

Initial measures adopted within ESI Funds to deal with the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised Roma communities

(Information available by April 2020)

June 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 European Structural and Investment Funds (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 the 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 gathers the outcomes of the first round of the consultation process EURoma is undertaking among its partners (by means of an online questionnaire and bilateral contacts) on whether and how they are using or planning to use ESI Funds to address the particularly negative impact of the urgent and complex COVID-19 crisis on marginalised communities such as Roma. This document provides a snapshot of the input received until end April 2020 and will be regularly updated in order to keep track of the latest developments and expand the information available.

I. Context

Roma are overrepresented among the most vulnerable people in the European Union (EU) and, therefore, **suffer in a more disproportionate manner from the negative impact of whatever crisis, including the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.** This crisis is already placing broad layers of the European Roma in a serious situation of vulnerability, helplessness and lack of protection of their fundamental rights.

In this emergency context, it is urgent to pay special attention to the most disadvantaged social groups: **political and financial tools need to be mobilised to put in place emergency measures to prevent, avoid and alleviate the negative impact of this health, economic and social crisis** on those persons most affected by poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation, as is the case of many European Roma population across the EU.

While in its initial phases it was essential to inform and promote prevention and containment health measures, **now it is also highly important to face the new and upcoming complex scenario in which new social risks are combined with the health situation and the underlying situation of high vulnerability dragging down the Roma population.**

On 13 March, the **European Commission (EC)** set out an **EU coordinated response to counter the economic impact of COVID-19** providing a series of measures aimed at ensuring that national support actions are put in place to tackle the outbreak of the Coronavirus as soon as possible. **One of the most important calls for the mobilisation of the EU budget** so that its existing instruments can serve to alleviate the negative impact of the health crisis.

As part of this response, the EC launched the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative \(CRII\)](#), in which Cohesion Policy funding and the [EU Solidarity Fund \(EUSF\)](#) play a central role, and the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus \(CRII+\)](#), which complements the measures adopted under the first package by introducing extraordinary flexibility to allow full-mobilisation of all non-utilised support from ESI Funds. In addition, on 8 April 2020, **Commissioners Helena Dalli (Equality), Stella Kyriakides (Health and Food Safety) and Nicolas Schmit (Jobs and Social Rights)** sent, on behalf of the Commission, a **letter to the relevant Ministers in each Member State emphasising the need for specific measures for vulnerable groups, including Roma**, in the context of the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis. In this letter, the Commissioners reassured Member States of the urgent measures taken to ensure financial back-up and targeted assistance under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives.

The **European Parliament** also approved **urgent measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19**, which, following the formal approval by the **European Council**, were published in the Official Journal on 31 March and entered into force the day after. **Prioritising investments in the most vulnerable groups to counter the extremely negative impact of the current crisis should be the focus of EU/national investments and policies/measures.**

Finally, the **revised proposal for a [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2021-2027](#)** tabled by the EC on 27 May aims to address the consequences of this crisis in all its dimensions, combining the necessary social investments and social measures in the COVID-19 aftermath with the challenges ahead to reach a green, digital and resilient Europe. An **emergency temporary recovery instrument ('[Next Generation EU](#))** has been proposed to complement this initiative and provide additional funds to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought by the pandemic, kickstart the recovery and prepare for a better future for the next generation.

As part of this framework, the EC has also put forward **proposals aiming to provide a swift update to the rules of both the current funding programmes and the 2021-2027 programming period** in order to respond to the new challenges. As an immediate response, the [REACT-EU initiative](#) will make available €55 billion of additional resources to the cohesion policy funds (ESF, ERDF and Cohesion Fund) and to the FEAD in 2020-2022 to counter the negative impact of the coronavirus, giving continuity and extending the measures delivered through the CRII and CRII+. The ESF plays a key role in this initiative sustaining employment and supporting social inclusion. As a long-term response, the EC has proposed important **amendments to the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) proposal** in the framework of the new proposals for the 2021-2027 EU budget.

In this context, **EU Roma Network** has launched an **ongoing consultation process among its partners** (by means of an online questionnaire and bilateral contacts) **on whether and how they are initially using or planning to use ESI Funds to address the particularly negative impact of the urgent and complex COVID-19 crisis on marginalised communities such as Roma**. This document provides a snapshot of the first round of consultation, including the information available in the first stages of the crisis (until end April 2020). Consultation continues in order to keep track of the latest developments and expand the information available. Therefore, this should be considered a living document that will be regularly updated.

II. Scope and initial remarks

This document gathers the input received from eleven EURoma partner countries (out of fifteen): Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czech Republic (CZ), Finland (FI), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Portugal (PT), Slovak Republic (SK) and Spain (ES).

Depending on the country, feedback comes from ESI Funds' authorities (Managing Authority/Intermediate Body/ESI Funds Coordinating Authority), National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs) or both¹, at the discretion of each partner country's authorities.

This document does not intend to be an exhaustive overview of the situation across the EU; it aims to provide a snapshot of specific measures already in place or planned in the very initial phases of the crisis based on the information gathered from the abovementioned EURoma partners (in terms of countries and Operational Programmes) at a particular moment in time (until end April) with a view to:

- Contribute to the sharing of information and practices among partners and other relevant stakeholders;
- Analyse some initial trends as regards the use of ESI Funds to address the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised Roma communities; and
- Serve as baseline for an ongoing process of information gathering and analysis that feeds into a joint reflection on a potential way forward as well as existing challenges and possible solutions.

While this document mainly focuses on the use of European funds, notably ESI Funds, it also includes information on measures related to funds at the national level (national, regional and local), mainly provided by the NRCPs and directly related to their work.

It is worth noting that when the first round of consultation referred to in this document took place (April), there was still a lot of uncertainty on the possible measures to be undertaken and the definition of these measures (notably as regards EU Funds, particularly ESI Funds). Considering this and the need for administrations to continuously adopt changes to adapt to the current critical situation, EURoma will continue with the process of consultation and information gathering to follow the evolution and consider the latest developments.

III. Main findings

1. The majority of countries **foresee special measures** (new initiatives or adaptations in the existing ones) **related to EU funds, and in particular to ESI Funds, to counter the particularly negative impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable people**, such as Roma (BG, ES, FI, GR, HR, HU, IT, PT, SK).

In addition, some partners report **measures related to national funding**, in combination or not with EU/ESI Funds (BU, CZ, ES, FI, GR, HU, SK).

¹ ESI Funds authorities: Belgium (Flanders OP), Bulgaria (Human Resources Development OP), Croatia (Efficient Human Resources OP), Italy (Social Inclusion OP), Portugal (Social Inclusion and Employment OP).
NRCP: Czech Republic, Finland.

Both: Greece (NRCP and ESF Actions Coordination and Monitoring Authority), Hungary (NRCP and Human Resources Development OP), Slovakia (NRCP and Human Resources OP), Spain (NRCP and Social Inclusion and Social Economy OP).

2. As regards the measures related to ESI Funds, the following options are used:

- **Direct modifications/amendments on the part of ESI Funds beneficiaries** (BG, ES, HU, IT, PT), following the possibilities offered in EC's proposals, including:
 - Adoption of flexibility measures allowing beneficiaries to make changes in operations/projects (those already in place or new ones) to adapt them to the new reality (e.g. content, supported activities, calendar, indicators, etc.).
 - Changes as regards the requirements related to the funds (extension of deadlines, cost accountability, etc.).
 - Inclusion of specific measures within the OPs addressed to the most vulnerable communities.
- **Adoption of new measures following the launch of specific calls within ESI Funds programmes** (BG, FI, GR, HR, SK)

Only a few countries had already defined and published specific calls at the time of the consultation (BG, GR); others were planning to do it at a later stage, in April or May (FI, HR, SK). The target group of calls included vulnerable groups (HR), people in a vulnerable situation following the pandemic (FI) or deprived/marginalised/socially excluded areas (SK). Other countries were still considering whether new measures/specific calls would be launched.

Approach and targeting

3. As regards the **approach used and how Roma are targeted**, it seems that there is a trend to adopt a mainstream approach, opting for **measures open to individuals with needs in a given city/town/village in general rather than focusing specifically on Roma**, both as regards EU/ESI Funds (BG, ES, FI, GR, HR, HU, IT) and national funds (CZ, ES, FI).

In addition, in most cases there is no explicit mention of Roma (CZ, ES, FI, GR, HU), although they are considered as part of the potential beneficiaries. Only a few countries use the explicit mention (HR, IT).

A second option are **measures with a more territorial approach, targeting most deprived areas (settlements) and/or marginalised and socially excluded areas (neighbourhoods)**, related both to ESI Funds (BG, SK, HU, IT) and national funds (GR, HU, SK). In these cases, Roma are mentioned explicitly, or measures are targeted to territories where Roma exclusively live in or with a high percentage of Roma.

In this sense, it seems that the type of funding (EU or national) is not directly related to the type of approach used.

Funding sources

4. As regards the **EU funds (ESI Funds or others) related to the measures** adopted:

- It seems that the most common ESI Fund (and also EU Fund in general) is the **European Social Fund (ESF)** (BG, ES, FI, GR, HR, HU, IT, PT, SK). Actions related to **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** are reported to a lesser extent (GR, HU, IT, SK) and not much information is provided on them.

The second most common EU Fund is the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)** (BG, ES, HU, IT, PT, SK). Actions mostly relate to the distribution of protective material, food distribution (increase in the number of end recipients, flexibility as regards eligibility criteria, etc.), simplification of administrative procedures and flexibility to adapt interventions.

Other ESI Funds, notably the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), are not mentioned. The same applies to other EU Funds such as the European Union Solidarity Fund.

The prevalence of the ESF and the FEAD may be related to the immediate and basic needs they could cover in the initial phases of the crisis and, secondarily, to fact that there is a high predominance of authorities managing ESF (alone or in combination with ERDF) among EURoma partners and that some of them are also in charge of FEAD.

- In some cases, measures reported also relate to **funds at the national level** (national, regional, local). National funding is the most common one (BG, CZ, ES, FI, GR, HU, IT, SK), complemented in a few cases by regional (SK) or local budget (FI, GR, HU, SK).
5. Many of the authorities reporting the use of several European funds **plan to use them in a combined manner**, notably **ESF and FEAD** (BG, IT) and in other cases **ESF and ERDF** (IT, SK). Others only plan to use one fund (HR) or different funds but separately (GR, HU). For those countries using the combination of funds, it is not clear yet how it will be implemented in practice.
 6. Out of the countries/OPs with measures under ESF, it seems that there is a **trend to frame the special measures (whether new ones or adaptations) within the same Thematic Objectives (TO)/Investment Priorities (IP) that were already used to target Roma**, whether **IP 9 (ii)** (BG, ES, IT, SK) or others, notably **IP 9 (i)** (HR, HU). Only a few exceptions are noted, notably GR (**IP 9 (iv)** instead of TO 10) and HU (no IP 9 (ii)).
 7. At the time of the survey, in several countries, there was still certain **uncertainty on whether setting up the special measures (new ones or adaptations) would imply amendments or reprogramming of funds** (e.g. HU, SK) **or whether the amendments or reprogramming would be within the same OP or a different one** (GR). In others, it was clear that measures would include amendments/reprogramming in one or several OPs of relevance (BG, ES, IT) (although in some cases they may not have happened yet), or that it would not be the case (HR).
 8. Many of the countries intended to use the **option offered by the EC-Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to cover these measures with unused funds** (BG, ES, FI, GR, SK). In other cases, this was not the plan (HU, IT), perhaps because initiatives do not imply additional funds, but rather merely measures of flexibility (HU) or use of resources already allocated but not used by beneficiaries (IT). In other cases (HR), this was not clear yet.
 9. There is a trend not to use the option to **request the EC for 100% co-funding for these interventions** (BG, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT).

Measures planned: scope, type

10. It seems that **measures funded by EU/ESI Funds mainly have a national territorial dimension** (BG, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT), in some cases complemented with measures at regional (GR) and/or local level (GR, IT). Exceptionally, measures only have a regional and/or local territorial approach (SK).
11. **Management at national level seems to be the most common option selected for measures funded by EU/ESI Funds** (BG, ES, GR, HR, HU, IT, SK). In a few cases, this national management is **combined with management at the regional (ES, GR, SK) and local level (BG, IT)**. Only in the case of Italian ESI Funds authorities, the model selected combines all levels of management (national, regional, local, NGOs, joint cooperation). In addition to the actors involved in the management system already in place for ordinary measures, cooperation with other actors (mainly the actors/units in charge of the management of the coronavirus crisis at local level) is proposed in order to avoid overlapping and maximize the effectiveness of the measures.

Measures related to national funding seem to follow a more ‘cooperative’ model, with different actors/levels of management involved (national, regional and local authorities, NGOs..) (CZ, ES, FI, GR, HU, SK).

12. The two **most common areas of support funded by EU/ESI Funds** (in some cases they are even the only ones, notably the first one) are as follows:
 - **Healthcare information and support** (e.g. primary care)
 - **Distribution of food and basic necessities**

These are followed by **specific actions for families in a situation of extreme poverty**, reinforcing the action of social services and **educational support for children**.

These four areas of support largely correspond to those reported as regards **national funding**, complemented by three additional areas:

- Socio-Sanitary intervention specifically for segregated environments and with high social exclusion (guarantee the supply of basic utilities such as water, electricity and gas)
- Support delivery of community-based services
- Emergency financial aid for street vendors / scrap metal collectors/ other ceased economic activities

Two countries also report additional areas of support with EU/ESI Funds, including the participation in online cultural and art activities (HR) and the support to SMEs to retain jobs (HU).

13. At the time of the consultation not much information was available on several **aspects related to the measures**:
 - **Length**. However, those that already had defined the length had opted for short-term measures, from three to six months (BG) to a maximum twenty-four months (GR).
 - **Planned budget**. Some countries were exploring possibilities to shift free funds to new initiatives in practice.
 - **Estimated schedule**.

IV. Conclusions and points for further analysis and reflection

According to the information gathered, it seems that the majority of countries foresee special measures related to EU funds, in particular ESI Funds, to counter the particularly negative impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable people, such as Roma. In some cases, they concern the direct modifications/amendments on the part of ESI Funds beneficiaries (in line with the possibilities offered by EC), in others the adoption of new measures following the launch of specific calls within ESI Funds programmes. In addition, some partners report measures related to national funding, in combination or not with EU Funds/ESI Funds.

While during the first round of consultation there was still a lot of uncertainty on the measures to be undertaken and/or on specific aspects of their development, some trends can be already observed. Among them:

- The **use of mainstream approaches to target Roma**, opting for measures open to individuals with needs in general (which in many cases do not even explicitly mention Roma) and territorial approaches, targeting the most deprived areas (settlements) and/or marginalised and socially excluded areas (neighbourhoods).
- The **predominance of the use of the ESF and the FEAD**, followed by the ERDF to a lesser extent.
- The **trend to frame the special measures planned with ESF (whether new ones or adaptations) within the same TOs/IPs that were already used to target Roma**, whether IP 9 (ii) or others, notably IP 9 (i), with only a few exceptions.
- The intention to **use the option offered by the EC-Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to cover these measures with unused funds but not the option to request the EC for 100% co-funding for these interventions**.
- The predominance of **measures with a national territorial dimension** (in some cases complemented with measures at regional and/or local level) **and a management at national level** for EU/ESI Funds.
- The prevalence of two **areas of support: healthcare information and support** (e.g. primary care) and **distribution of food and basic necessities**.

In addition to the initial information on the use of funds, as planned in the first phases of the COVID-19 outbreak, presented above, a number of additional **questions could be tackled at a later stage for a more robust analysis and understanding of the situation**, including:

- The extent to which the new measures adopted or planned with EU/ESI Funds imply the allocation of additional resources for Roma inclusion or the use of existing funds (whether those not used or those already allocated to other purposes). This is clearer in the case of national funds, with the creation in some cases of special funds or the allocation of extraordinary funds to address the situation.

- Whether countries have primarily used national or EU Funds (ESI Funds or others) to address the impact of the crisis. It seems that the difficulties to quickly mobilise funds to reach the ground may have slowed down and delayed measures. While this applies to all types of funding, it may be more relevant in the case of EU/ESI Funds, because of its architecture and because of the time required to consider how to use the options proposed by the EC in response to COVID-19. This may be the reason why it seems that in some countries funds at national level have been the main initial source of funding to counter the immediate challenges and negative impacts of the crisis, in some cases together with the FEAD.
- How countries/OPs using mainstream approaches to target Roma ensure that measures adopted do reach Roma.
- How the combination of funds is used in practice.
- The reasons for countries not using the option to request the EC for 100% co-funding for these measures. This may be linked to the fact that, while this option allows for concentrating resources at this particular moment of emergency, it does not imply the allocation of additional resources, but rather using the existing ones in a shorter period of time. It remains to be seen whether this trend will remain in the coming months.
- The degree of cooperation between the authorities in charge of ESI Funds and Roma policies when considering the measures to address the impact of crisis on Roma in order to match the needs with the existing funds.

This first snapshot on the use of EU Funds (and in particular ESI Funds), complemented in some cases with national funds, to tackle the negative impact of COVID-19 on marginalised communities helps to identify some initial trends and questions for further analysis.

Now that the worst of the health crisis is over, it is time to fully mobilise ESI Funds and use all their potential to address the serious consequences at the social and economic levels and contribute to the complex recovery ahead of us. The different initiatives adopted by the European Commission over the past months offer numerous possibilities to maximise their potential. In this sense, it is also essential to move from only measures related to health and coverage of basic needs to other areas of support which are key for maintaining and promoting structural changes, such as employment or education.