



## POLICY PAPER

# SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA

Of the 15-30 million Roma<sup>1</sup> worldwide, it is estimated that between 10 to 12 million are living in Europe, approximately six million of whom live in the EU, which makes Roma the largest ethnic minority on the continent. Over the last ten years, and especially since the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007, Roma have been moving from Central and Eastern Europe to Western and Northern European countries in hope of finding a better life. However Roma communities continue to suffer throughout Europe from exceptionally high levels of discrimination, social exclusion and poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Eurodiaconia recognises the importance of EU legislation in place to protect the human and social rights of Roma such as the Lisbon Treaty which makes the European Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>3</sup> legally binding. However our position on Roma inclusion is not only based on a fundamental human rights approach. Our belief that all humans are created in the image of God with equal worth and dignity forms the basis for all Eurodiaconia's work. We believe that each person has God given potential and life, regardless of social situation, status, race, gender or age. Many of Eurodiaconia's members provide services and run projects specifically to help empower Roma communities, and although we cannot work on all areas of Roma discrimination, we *can* voice the concerns of our members as major providers of social and health services. For Eurodiaconia, **access to quality social services and health care for all** is at the heart of social Europe and is key in the inclusion of Roma in our communities. In this paper we outline some of the main obstacles to Roma inclusion specifically in terms of access to social and healthcare services and we give recommendations to the EU and the Member States to overcome these obstacles.

Obstacles to social inclusion cannot be targeted separately; rather an **integrated approach** must be taken in all policies and strategies for Roma inclusion, which considers their needs in a holistic manner and which ensures their participation. To fail to see people's needs from a holistic approach and to carry out initiatives without the engagement of Roma people, makes redundant the best willed or most generously financed projects and inclusion programmes. And whilst Eurodiaconia advocates for the rights of Roma, we acknowledge that with rights come responsibilities, and like all EU citizens, Roma are expected to contribute to and participate in civil life. Social inclusion is a two way process and every individual must be empowered to be active in that process.

Eurodiaconia is convinced that any strategy for Roma inclusion must have a **long-term perspective and long-term sustainability**. To expect significant results in a relatively short time may not be realistic as generations of Roma have grown up with segregation. Certainly, access to social and health services as well as education needs to be and can be improved more speedily. Integration, however, implies **participation and a two-way process** in societies, which requires a change in attitudes. Changing attitudes takes much longer, and patience may be required on the side of all stakeholders in this process.

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<sup>1</sup> (which include Travellers, Gypsies, Manouches, Ashkali and Sinti)

<sup>2</sup> THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN 11 EU MEMBER STATES - SURVEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE (FRA MAY 2012)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)





The perspective of this paper is directed largely to those communities of Roma living in Eastern and Central Europe and indigenous Roma living in Northern Europe who experience particularly difficult socio-economic situations in their countries. However given the more recent and growing pattern of Roma migrating from Central and Eastern Europe to Western and Northern European countries, we have dedicated a section of this paper to address the specific issues relating to free movement.

## The role of the EU and Member States

Political recognition at EU level has been gained of the serious discrimination faced by Roma, and the need to improve the socio-economic situation of Roma, in particular with the establishment of the European Platform for Roma Integration as well as the high level EU Roma summit. Eurodiaconia particularly welcomed the 2011 EU Framework on Roma Integration Strategies focussing on the four key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing, and the subsequent National Roma Integration Strategies established by each Member State. We acknowledge that Member States made an unprecedented commitment towards promoting Roma inclusion in 2011 as they endorsed the Framework document in the [EPSCO Council conclusions](#) . However what will be essential now, will be to see real political commitment translated into action right through from EU to grass roots level, to ensure that together with Roma the NRIS are implemented, regularly revisited and their progress evaluated. Political will at all levels, especially local level is essential to see change. The European Commission must ensure the robust monitoring of the NRIS and must ensure the National Contact Points for Roma inclusion meet regularly to share their challenges and successes and to exchange good practice, and also that they engage in regular dialogue with civil society.

The various EU funding sources available for Roma inclusion projects have also an important role to play, however it will be important that Commission carries out robust monitoring to see that these funds are used efficiently and effectively and reach the target group. However EU funds should not be used to make amends for flawed national policies; Member States must take up their responsibility and ensure they allocate sufficient national funding to address national challenges, and that EU funds compliment their national strategies for Roma integration. Again, participation and dialogue with civil society at EU and Member State level will be essential to ensure effective use of funds.

## The role of Diaconia

Diaconal organisations and church-related organisations have an essential role in combating poverty and social exclusion, including in relation to Roma communities. Social services enable Roma to integrate or reintegrate into society, to access and retain employment and offer a route out of poverty and exclusion, reinforcing their socio-economic independence. Our members' work covers all four areas of the Commission's Framework document including **health, housing, education and employment**. For more examples of our members' work with Roma, see our mapping [here](#). We strongly believe that churches and diaconal organisations are in an ideal position to work with Roma communities on the ground, where public service providers sometimes struggle to reach. The unique place of church in society and in the local community also means that Roma tend to trust church related service providers more than state-run institutions. Diaconal organisations can also engage Roma in their services as volunteers and staff. This ensures Roma feel greater ownership of projects and at the same time facilitates their integration into the labour market.

The European Commission has also acknowledged the role of churches in Roma inclusion in two specific references made in the Commission's Framework document. The first reference regarding **education** highlighted the *"need to strengthen links with communities through cultural/school mediators, churches, religious associations or communities and through active participation of the parents of Roma, to improve the intercultural competences of teachers, to reduce segregation and to ensure compliance with the duty to primary school attendance"*. Eurodiaconia members are working in a number of ways to improve access to education of Roma children, working closely with the parents, by providing education services at all levels as well as extra-curricular support and activities such as youth clubs, drop in centres and after-school homework support.



The Commission also stressed the potential to entrust churches and NGOs with the **implementation and management of part of state run inclusion programmes** in order to “*surmount capacity issues, such as lack of know-how and administrative capacity of managing authorities*”. We would remind managing authorities that many of our members’ have been working among Roma for many years and have gained expertise and know-how that can be an asset when implementing inclusion programmes. We would invite national and local authorities to work in cooperation with our members and to ensure their consultation at all stages of implementing the NRIS.

## Access to social protection and social services

Access to social and health care services is a fundamental human right. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly recognises the right to social security and social assistance. The Revised European Social Charter<sup>4</sup> requires Member States to guarantee the right to social assistance, the right to housing and the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection which includes provision of family housing (Part II, Article 16) without discrimination on any ground. Furthermore, the Racial Equality Directive (RED) also includes an express prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination in a broad range of fields including social security and healthcare. However even with this legislation in place, our members witness that many Roma are still unable to access basic social and health services.

One major obstacle that prevents many Roma from accessing social and health services is the lack of appropriate documentation, including birth and marriage certificates, proof of health insurance, residence permits and identification documents, often leaving Roma officially “stateless” and putting into question their legal status. The legal status of the Roma minority represents an essential issue as it strongly influences the right to social security and health care systems, and access to education. Furthermore, if Roma are not formally employed their social entitlements are severely limited since in most Member States access to social rights is associated with employment. For this reason the Active Inclusion Recommendation<sup>5</sup> is important because it stresses the importance of inclusion from those furthest from the labour market through the provision of enabling services and an adequate minimum income. Furthermore, lower levels of education, administrative costs and bureaucratic hurdles prevent many Roma from acquiring the documents necessary to access their rights, especially when moving to another Member State. Eurodiaconia therefore urges Member States to remove bureaucratic, administrative and financial obstacles to facilitate civil registration.

Other barriers that prevent Roma communities accessing social services are poor information and distrust with respect to social workers. Contact between social service practitioners and Roma communities are further hindered by communication obstacles, such as language barriers. National governments therefore need to invest in improving communication and mediation between Roma communities and social service providers. Accessibility and information needs to be a priority to ensure that Roma are well informed about their social rights and responsibilities.

### Our recommendations

#### The EU should

- Ensure Member States implement the Active Inclusion principles as laid out in the 2008 Recommendation and incorporate the principles into the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS)

#### Member States should

- Simplify administrative processes and remove financial barriers for civil registration
- Provide help with administrative procedures such as filling in papers especially for Roma with numeracy and literacy problems

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/reporting/statereports/Portugal4\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/reporting/statereports/Portugal4_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/employment\\_and\\_social\\_policy/social\\_inclusion\\_fight\\_against\\_poverty/em0009\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/social_inclusion_fight_against_poverty/em0009_en.htm)



- Make funds available for mediation between social care practitioners and Roma, especially to employ local Roma as mediators
- Choose mediators according to their acceptance in the Roma community as the most important criterion, not their formal qualifications
- Fund training for social care practitioners in the field of cultural awareness
- Provide and make accessible easy to understand information about social rights (and in Romani languages)

## Access to health care

Typically, individuals belonging to Roma populations have a lower life expectancy and higher morbidity compared with the national average. Below standard living conditions adversely affect the health of many living in Roma communities. These communities often lack access to basic amenities such as electricity, running water and sanitation. Poverty and poor levels of accommodation together with discrimination in the provision of health services have led to high levels of communicable diseases, malnutrition and undernourishment. Furthermore Roma often live in isolated rural areas or camps in the outskirts of cities with limited public transport facilities. This exacerbates problems of accessing health care centres or professionals. Due to their poor economic situation, many Roma cannot afford to pay for medication even if they do manage to see a medical professional. It is necessary to underline the interrelated determinants of health which include access to employment, education, housing, health and social care, again emphasising the need for an *integrated* approach to improve the situation of Roma.

Although in most EU countries Roma can access emergency health care services, they can often not access *basic* health care. For this reason a number of Eurodiaconia members are providing health care for Roma when they cannot access it through regular means. Again, inaccessibility is largely due to the lack of identification documents. However, for many, language barriers, lack of finances and lack of information about rights are further obstacles that prevent many from accessing the care they need. It is clear that the provision of health services in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way would improve the health of many Roma and decrease health inequalities. Furthermore, access to quality health care is a basic European fundamental right that as European citizens, Roma are entitled to access.

### Our recommendations

#### Member States should

- Support Roma grassroots organisations to provide information services for social and health rights
- Support cultural mediation to help the process of communication and liaison between healthcare providers and Roma communities.
- Carry out pro-active health initiatives with an outreach perspective to help to build user confidence
- When necessary, take health care to the home for example via mobile clinics

## Education

Segregation of Roma continues to be a problem in Europe in all aspects of social life; in particular segregation in education is a barrier to inclusion, clearly linked to territorial segregation and clearly impacting on employment opportunities. There is a high early drop-out rate of Roma children, and many are not enrolled in school at all. Again, the lack of identification documents prevents many Roma children from enrolling in schools. In some countries, Roma children continue to be misplaced in special needs schools where the quality of education is often inferior to that of mainstream schools.

Often Roma children experience language barriers or simply face discrimination in the classroom. Whilst mediators can provide essential support to teachers, it is also important to train mainstream teachers to work with Roma students and parents. Our members stress that it is equally if not more important to work with the parents to encourage them to send their children to school. School attendance is often prevented simply because many Roma families cannot cover the cost of travel to school, books or food. Parents will



sometimes need incentives to send their children to school rather than to work (which is more lucrative for the family in the short term). Furthermore, school segregation fosters stereotypes about the “other” – non-Roma about Roma, Roma about “gadje” (non-Roma), which become fixed in the minds of children at their most impressionable age, this is vital to prevent beginning from early education.

Eurodiaconia would like to see national and local governments actively reduce segregated and low quality education of Roma and address early school dropout. Although the Commission Framework document aims for all Roma to complete primary school, Eurodiaconia would stress that all children should be completing secondary education. We would also stress the importance of early children education and care for a child’s development. The findings of the World Bank report<sup>6</sup> show that Romani children attending pre-school have much higher scores on measures of learning, and much higher likelihood of subsequent enrolment into secondary schools. Furthermore, the report shows that in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, children attending pre-school are much less likely to be streamed into ‘special needs’ education designed for children with learning disabilities. Investing in early childhood and care means giving Roma children a more equal start in life. We can only hope to end intergenerational poverty when Roma children start receiving quality education and therefore have more and better opportunities for future employment.

## *Our recommendations*

### **Member States should**

- Encourage and promote the engagement of Roma teachers in schools
- Prioritise high quality, inclusive early childhood education for Roma children
- Ensure Roma and non-Roma children are educated together
- Cover the costs of all primary and secondary educational costs for all low income families
- Support and facilitate mediation between schools and Roma families, especially to overcome language barriers. Mediators from Roma communities should be employed
- Ensure that Roma teachers train other teachers on working with Roma children
- Actively tackle the problem of segregation of Roma in education and in particular the misplacement of children in special needs schools
- Reduce the number of early school leavers from secondary education pursuant to the Europe 2020 strategy and targets
- Provide support with homework for children
- Actively tackle public discrimination and racism through education about Roma culture, history and identity as part of school curricula for all pupils.

## **Housing**

Access to decent housing is a European fundamental right. However, the Fundamental Rights Agency Comparative Report on the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the EU<sup>7</sup> provides evidence that Roma are strongly disadvantaged in the private and social housing throughout the EU, including discrimination in access to housing, poor housing conditions, segregation (poor access to public services, employment and schools) and forced evictions. Lack of running water, sanitation systems, and electricity inevitably lower standards of living conditions and increase health problems. Eurodiaconia finds it unacceptable that anyone should live in such conditions today in Europe. Local governments must therefore identify where these basic amenities are missing among Roma communities and ensure their access is accessible and affordable. Housing segregation needs to be addressed in every NRIS to ensure that it does not provide barriers to education or access to health care etc.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.worldbank.org/roma](http://www.worldbank.org/roma) based on the 2011 UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia,

<sup>7</sup> [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/ROMA-Housing-Comparative-Report\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/ROMA-Housing-Comparative-Report_en.pdf)



Reports also reveal that those Roma who try to leave segregated settlements encounter serious problems when trying to access public or private rental markets. For example social housing criteria often exclude Roma because they require employment or identification documents. Furthermore, when it is necessary to give proof of a fixed address, Roma with an itinerant lifestyle are often immediately excluded from receiving social benefits, as a fixed address is necessary for payment<sup>8</sup>. Eurodiaconia would therefore like to see the simplification of national and local administrative procedures that allow Roma to register more easily (with or without a fixed address) in order to be able to access their social rights such as decent housing.

Our members also witness an increasing number of government-led evictions of Roma settlements without providing a sustainable solution for their housing needs, often carried out proceeding local elections. Eurodiaconia condemns the scapegoating and direct or indirect discrimination of Roma and stresses that the current lack of political will to include Roma in society at national and local level is a fundamental obstacle to Roma inclusion.

## *Our recommendations*

### **The Member States should**

- Recognise and enforce the right to decent housing for all (including all basic amenities such as access to water, electricity, gas)
- Facilitate Roma participation in housing planning and implementation
- Avoid segregated housing solutions
- Avoid evictions as much as possible; instead long-term, integrated and inclusive housing policies must be key elements of the NRIS.
- Provide tenancy support/training as a prevention of homelessness due to tenancy defaults

## **Employment**

Roma communities also face considerable exclusion from the labour market, suffering from high unemployment rates and systematic barriers to accessing the labour markets for reasons already mentioned such as residential segregation, unequal access to quality education, and direct or indirect racial discrimination by employers<sup>9</sup>. Employment is one of the most effective means to help people lift themselves out of poverty and further social inclusion, therefore Eurodiaconia firmly believes that the EU and Member States need to do more to systematically improve labour integration of Roma through the monitoring and the implementation of the NRIS and the RED. Specifically, the EU should monitor whether Member States are effectively implementing the principle of inclusive labour markets as one of the main pillars of the Active Inclusion Strategy. National governments and local authorities should also develop and implement education and employment interventions and schemes that better support Roma EU citizens in the local labour market. Work integrating social enterprises in particular can play a key role in integrating Roma facing discrimination and should be promoted and supported by the EU.

## *Our recommendations*

### **The EU should**

- Ensure that Member States implement inclusive labour market policies as stated in the Recommendation on Active Inclusion.
- Prioritise a social market economy and invest in social enterprises, particularly those that aim to engage unemployed and disadvantaged Roma

### **The Member States should**

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.errc.org>

<sup>9</sup> (The RED and the Framework Employment Directive prohibit discrimination in the labour market on the grounds of race and ethnicity).



- Develop and implement intervention that supports Roma EU citizens in the local labour market<sup>10</sup> including local level social enterprises
- Carry out best practice sharing on labour market integration for Roma at regular national level meetings

## A holistic approach

Although the four key policy pillars of health, education, housing and employment are important, our members insist that a holistic approach to Roma inclusion is necessary. A holistic approach implies taking into consideration elements of culture and identity into inclusion policies and programmes, and going beyond merely physical needs. We must recognise and respect the Roma cultures that exist but also recognise that Roma are individuals who have their own individual dreams and goals in life, which may differ from those of the service provider or policy makers.

To build trust and mutual understanding in diverse societies, time and resources will have to be invested in intercultural relation-building and intercultural communication activities. Reconciliation and anti-discrimination actions will also be necessary in countries where Roma-gadje relations have been challenging. To build socially cohesive societies we will also need to educate or re-educate the non-Roma population about the Roma history and culture for example. Culture in particular can be utilised to bridge the gaps between various groups in society. Finally, to see a person in a holistic way means looking beyond mere material or physical needs, including taking into account spiritual needs. Support services for spiritual matters can greatly reinforce personal development, and in turn support the empowerment process of Roma. Churches and church-related organisations can be key actors in this service provision.

## Roma and free movement

Some of our members in Western and Northern European countries are receiving growing numbers of Roma from Central and Eastern European countries who are moving temporarily for work. Enjoying their right to free movement as EU citizens they do not have to register in the local municipalities if they stay less than three months. However consequently they are technically regarded as 'tourists' which grants them no rights to access to social services or health care (apart from emergency health care). Our members' concern is that having a 'tourist' status means that government officials are turning a blind eye to this group and are avoiding taking any responsibility for the exclusion they experience.

Free movement is one of the foundations of the EU as acknowledged by the Treaty. However, residence rights provided by free movement is still unclear, especially for people who do not have or no longer have any kind of income. For example access to emergency support and accommodation as well as access to social welfare benefits and long-term homeless accommodation differ according to the host Member State. Many Member States offer as a last resort to pay for the travel back to the country of origin. However, despite their difficult situation, considerable numbers of homeless EU citizens (including Roma) do not wish to return due to extremely poor socio-economic conditions in their country of origin. In which case, expulsions of Roma are often an inefficient use of public resources since, like all EU citizens, they are free to travel back again. Whilst we stress the need for governments to recognise social rights of EU mobile citizens, we also acknowledge that conditions of extreme poverty and exclusion in some Central and Eastern European countries is a causal factor of Roma migrating and must be addressed.

Whilst the challenges that mobile Roma face are quite different from those living sedentary lives in Central and Eastern Europe, a better understanding of Roma history, culture and identity can help those working with Roma in both sending and hosting countries. For this reason pan-European networks such as Eurodiaconia can be an ideal platform for facilitating cross-border partnerships, networking and mutual learning, to provide quality support services at both ends of the journey. Our members can provide

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<sup>10</sup> [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Memo-Roma-movement-091109\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Memo-Roma-movement-091109_en.pdf)



information and guidance before Roma leave their 'home' country to better prepare them for the reality that awaits them, as well as work with newly arrived Roma looking for work.

It is important to note that Roma are not the only people who become excluded when moving within Europe and that free movement is not by any means an exclusively Roma-related issue. The question of EU free movement and social security coordination is an important and sensitive discussion being had at EU level, as a number of Member States are wanting to change EU rules in order to restrict free movement. Eurodiaconia has written a policy paper on "*Free movement in the EU: preventing destitution of mobile EU citizens*" which further develops some of the challenges relating to free movement and gives recommendations on how to prevent the social exclusion and destitution of mobile EU citizens. For a more detailed position on this issue and Eurodiaconia's policy recommendations, please refer to this paper.

## Overarching Recommendations to EU decision makers and national governments

### *The EU should*

- Monitor closely the implementation of NRIS, as well as the 2013 Recommendation on 'Effective Roma integration measures', linking progress reports with the European Semester process to ensure Roma inclusion is mainstreamed into social and economic policy
- Continue to develop mutual learning and best practice sharing on Roma inclusion among the Member States in close cooperation with civil society organisations
- Ensure the European Platform for Roma Integration creates a space for real dialogue among civil society and representatives of the Member States and for stocktaking on progress made in implementing the NRIS
- Ensure Member States are taking an **active inclusion** approach for Roma with equal emphasis on the three pillars of adequate minimum income, access to quality services and inclusive labour markets
- Carry out robust monitoring of the effective use of EU funds aimed at Roma inclusion.

### *Member States should*

- Ensure measures taken that impact on Roma are in compliance with the principles laid out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in conformity with the Race Equality Directive
- Ensure the active involvement of Roma and civil society organisations in the design, revision and implementation of the NRIS
- Ensure Roma community participation in all inclusion projects, policies, and programmes (taking seriously the needs of Roma, which requires dialogue based on trust developed over time).
- Not victimise Roma by only handing out donations; people need to feel empowered to make change and to take ownership of their lives
- Take into account the culture and traditions of Roma and the heterogeneous nature of Roma groups
- Ensure the transparency of the National Contact Point for Roma inclusion and its cooperation with civil society
- Participate fully and effectively in the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion
- Ensure national policies for Roma inclusion are effectively implemented at *local level*.
- Ensure the sustainability of inclusion projects through ongoing funding opportunities that are accessible to all civil society organisations (including small NGOs)