

Promoting Roma Inclusion

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Eurodiaconia

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity**, **equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.



We bring members together to **share practices**, **impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Introduction

The Roma people are the largest ethnic minority in Europe, with about 10 to 12 million Roma living on the continent, out of which approximately six million live in the EU¹. Despite living in Europe for thousands of years, they face particular high levels of discrimination, social exclusion and poverty². Many Eurodiaconia members provide services and run specific projects to empower Roma communities on the local level. They work with indigenous Roma communities, as well as with Roma who have been moving from Central and Eastern Europe to Western and Northern European countries, hoping for a better life.

Eurodiaconia is a dynamic, Europe-wide community of social and health care organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconal service, which are committed to promoting social justice. It represents 45 members working in 32 countries, including churches, not-for-profit welfare organisations and NGOs and has been actively involved in the promotion of Roma inclusion across Europe since 2010.

Eurodiaconia's advocacy work is based on its members experience with the provision of social and healthcare services to vulnerable individuals, including Roma, through initiatives ranging from shelters and housing support, afterschool educational programmes to vocational training and community-building activities. Both within and beyond the borders of the EU, many of Eurodiaconia's members combine service provision and anti-discrimination measures with political advocacy.

Eurodiaconia and its members welcome the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) as a key tool to bring Roma inclusion higher onto the political agenda, and to promote a more effective and integrated response to destitution among Roma across Europe. This policy paper presents Eurodiaconia's assessment of the progress in the field of Roma inclusion since the launch of the EU Framework for NRIS in 2011 and key recommendations for the final phase of implementation (2017-2020).

Building on member priorities and observations, this policy paper calls for increased stakeholder coordination and transparency, a strengthened emphasis on tackling discrimination and anti-gypsyism, as well as new ways to promote equal access to health, housing, education and employment. It also calls for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective across all areas of the NRIS, as Roma women are particularly vulnerable because of their position within the Roma community.

All the areas mentioned above are rights that are included in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which has been jointly proclaimed by the European Institutions in November 2017 and which aims at making existing social rights more effective for all EU citizens. **To make these rights also a reality for Roma, Eurodiaconia and its members call on the European Commission to make use of the European Semester to increase the impetus on Member States to support Roma inclusion in all fields of the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies.**

¹ Fundamental Rights Agency: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/roma>

² Fundamental Rights Agency, The Situation of Roma in 11 Member States – Survey, http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf

Improving access to education

Eurodiaconia members are working in a number of ways to improve access to education of Roma children, by providing education services at all levels and encouraging parents' involvement. Measures include extra-curricular support and activities such as youth clubs, drop in centres and after-school homework support. Their work is intended to provide additional and individualised support, which is often lacking in mainstream schools. Certain projects therefore accompany the entire family over a long period to build trust and ensure continuity in the children's pathway.

Overall, Eurodiaconia members have observed slight improvements in access to education for Roma since the introduction of the EU Framework on NRIS in 2011. Drop-out rates from primary school have been reduced whilst pre-school attendance rates and Roma participation in afterschool programmes have increased. In some countries the involvement of Roma mediators at schools has proven to be particularly beneficial to increase attendance rates of school-aged children. However, it has also been reported that in some countries, local authorities have denied access to school to Roma children newly arriving from Central or Eastern European countries.

Despite these improvements the percentage of Roma finishing secondary or higher education remains very low. Drop-out can often be

explained by the need to gain money or early marriage, especially for girls. Furthermore, educational segregation of Roma (which is often linked to spatial segregation) continues to constitute a key obstacle to ensuring a level playing field in countries such as Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. In some countries, Roma children continue to be wrongly placed in special needs schools, where the quality of education is often inferior to that of mainstream schools. In other cases, de facto geographic segregation is an alternative way leading to school segregation. Roma children who have access to mainstream education continue to face discrimination in the classroom and Roma culture and history continue to be underrepresented in school curricula across Europe.

Whilst mediators can provide essential support to teachers, it is also important to train mainstream teachers to work with Roma students and parents. Eurodiaconia members stress that it is equally if not more important to work with the parents to encourage them to send their children to school. Therefore continuity of support is necessary to build trust, which is key for prolonged and successful educational pathways. Finally, they consider that financial support is necessary, as school attendance is often prevented because many Roma families cannot cover the cost of travel to school, books or food.

To further improve Roma education, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Ensure that EU funds are effectively used for desegregation measures and improvement of education for Roma children;
- Monitor and tackle school segregation, in particular the misplacement of Roma children in special needs schools, by promoting desegregation programmes and inclusive education at all levels;
- Provide training and awareness-raising for teachers working with Roma children so that they have the capacities to promote intercultural education;
- Tackle discrimination and racism through education about Roma culture, history and identity as part of school curricula for all pupils and offer the option of learning the Romani language at school;
- Support and facilitate mediation between schools and Roma families, to overcome culture and language barriers by employing mediators from Roma communities and engaging Roma teachers in schools who can also serve as role models;
- Promote after school support and mentoring programmes to further reduce the risk of school drop-out, particularly in the context of secondary education and facilitate the transition towards vocational training, tertiary education or the labour market.

Improving access to employment

Employment is one of the most effective means to help people lift themselves out of poverty. Eurodiaconia members are actively involved in supporting access to the labour market for Roma through providing support with cv-writing and job search, vocational training and fostering social entrepreneurship. They are observing that Roma communities continue to face considerable exclusion from the labour market which is visible in the high unemployment rates³.

According to Eurodiaconia members, Roma are facing multiple barriers to accessing the labour markets. These include low education levels due to unequal access to quality education, a lack of information and understanding of the labour market, but also discrimination by employers. Residential segregation and a lack of mobility create additional barriers, as many Roma live in areas with little employment opportunities. Furthermore, they highlight the fact that young Roma are lacking role models and face difficulties imagining a career path. They often don't know which opportunities there are and have the feeling that studying will not significantly

improve their chances, because of discrimination on the labour market. All this heavily impacts their motivation for further education or training.

In their projects, Eurodiaconia members have been successful in supporting Roma people into work, through individualised approaches and targeted long-term measures. These include supporting young people in the transition from school to employment, but also adult Roma through training or grants to become entrepreneurs.

National governments and local authorities need to increase their efforts in developing and implementing targeted and tailor-made support schemes to combat this persisting trend. Mainstream measures to improve labour market access, such as the EU Youth Guarantee targeting persons below the age of 25, have demonstrated limited impact on those furthest away from the labour market, including Roma. Therefore, such schemes should ideally support and accompany young Roma from school to further education and to the labour market in an individualized way.

To further improve Roma employment, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Include specific measures on labour market inclusion of Roma in the 2018 EU Employment Guidelines, which will soon be discussed in the Council of the European Union;
- Design and use EU funding tools, such as the Youth Guarantee, in a way that allows to combine mainstream support with specific support measures for Roma;
- Provide 'second chance' education for adults who haven't completed compulsory education and promote vocational training schemes which correspond to labour market needs and lead to employment, including in social enterprises and self-employment;
- Increase the capacity of employment services of offering individualized career orientation, skills development and employment support, and provide training to fight discrimination of Roma;
- Encourage employers to engage Roma and other vulnerable groups, and tackle discrimination in the workplace. Promote mentoring programmes and create space for positive role models;
- Protect migrating Roma more effectively from exploitation, for example by introducing a firewall between processes of detection and apprehension and access to services;
- Link employment and housing support more closely to allow finding solutions for individual cases, as many Roma live in areas removed from potential workplaces and lack the means to commute.

³ The 2017 Fundamental Rights Agency's Survey found that 34% of surveyed household members declared themselves unemployed, with shares raising to 60% in Croatia, 57% in Spain and 55% in Bulgaria.

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

Improving access to housing

Access to adequate housing is a fundamental human right⁴. Despite this, millions of people in Europe still don't have access to adequate housing⁵ with Roma being disproportionately affected. Since the launch of the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies in 2011, Eurodiaconia members have not witnessed significant changes in terms of access to housing for Roma. They continue to be strongly disadvantaged in the spheres of private and social housing throughout the EU, as they face discrimination in access to housing, including social housing and forced evictions without providing a sustainable solution for their housing needs. Many of them live in poor housing conditions and segregated areas, lacking sometimes running water, sanitation systems and electricity which can heavily impact health conditions. In addition, segregated areas have often poor access to public services, employment and schools.

Roma are facing several obstacles for accessing adequate housing. Especially in the private

housing market Roma face discrimination and lack functioning complaint mechanisms. In addition, many social housing policies fail to address Roma and other marginalized groups. Many Roma face difficulties in registering for social housing, especially when they don't have an address or the necessary employment or identification documents. Moreover, some Eurodiaconia members report an increase in forced evictions throughout the last years. The network regrets the lack of Roma involvement in the development of housing solutions, and of preventive approaches to effectively reduce the rate of forced evictions.

National and local governments need to combat residential segregation to reduce barriers to related areas such as education, employment or access to healthcare and ensure adequate and affordable access to basic amenities. Furthermore, administrative procedures need to be improved and simplified to allow Roma to access their social rights such as decent housing.

To improve Roma access to housing, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Ensure that EU funds are used to support desegregation and investment in affordable housing, which also benefits Roma communities;
- Provide for sufficient and adequate social housing and review legal frameworks on access to social housing to reduce administrative barriers and simplify the access for vulnerable and marginalized persons;
- Promote an individualised and participative approach to housing which is involving the concerned Roma, considering and offering different housing models, including the upscaling of existing housing, while avoiding segregated housing solutions;
- Improve multi-sectoral stakeholder coordination in the area of housing, involving local authorities, housing cooperatives, Roma communities and NGOs;
- Counteract discrimination regarding access to housing for Roma by introducing and implementing functioning complaint mechanisms and sanctions, as well as adopting a preventive approach to eviction.

⁴ Art. 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf>

⁵ There is no exact data, however, more detailed information on the general housing situation in Europe can be found in

the FEANTSA report "The second Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2017": <http://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2017/03/21/the-second-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2017?bcParent=27>

Improving access to healthcare

Roma continue having a lower life expectancy compared with the national average⁶. Poverty and poor levels of accommodation, often characterized by a lack of access to electricity, water, heating and healthy food have led to high levels of communicable diseases, malnutrition and undernourishment. Additionally, Roma face discrimination in the provision of health services in several countries. Many Roma are not covered by health insurance and face more difficulties accessing basic health care. Often, they can only access emergency health care services.

Inaccessibility is due to a series of reasons, including lack of identification documents, language barriers, lack of financial means, lack of health awareness and information about their rights. Indeed, in certain areas many Roma have never been to a doctor and lack basic health knowledge. Furthermore, Roma often live in isolated rural areas or camps in the outskirts of cities with limited public transport facilities which exacerbates problems of accessing health care centres or professionals.

To improve Roma access to healthcare, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Explicitly include targeted measures to improve access to health for Roma in the framework of EU health policies;
- Ensure that EU funding is used to improve access to healthcare for Roma;
- Support NGOs to provide information services on social and health rights and to run programmes which promote health awareness as well as out-reach health initiatives to build user confidence;
- Create and train Roma health mediators to facilitate communication between healthcare providers and Roma communities and inform Roma about basic hygiene and health;
- Raise health awareness through school education, starting at early childhood education and including outreach to the parents;
- Train social and health care practitioners in cultural awareness to fight discrimination of Roma and other marginalized groups in health services

A number of Eurodiaconia members are providing healthcare for Roma when they cannot access it through regular means. Furthermore, they highlighted the need for more outreach work as well as promoting basic information about hygiene and healthcare. Access to healthcare is a European fundamental right⁷, which as citizens of the European Union, Roma should be entitled to access. Eurodiaconia urges Member States to remove bureaucratic, administrative and financial obstacles to facilitate civil registration of Roma, and to ensure the provision of health services in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way to decrease health inequalities. This should include access to healthcare for Roma who are working and living in a different EU country than their country of origin. In addition to this, non-active mobile EU citizens, including Roma, should have effective access to emergency healthcare and, where possible, to basic healthcare.

⁶ Fundación Secretariado Gitano, "Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe", 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_health_en.pdf

⁷ Art. 35 of the European Charta of Fundamental Rights, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN>

Mainstreaming a gender perspective

Roma women are particularly vulnerable because they face discrimination on multiple levels. They share the double burden of belonging to a marginalised ethnic community and a socioeconomically disadvantaged gender. Furthermore, the tradition of early marriages and early child-birth increases their risk of not completing their education and developing their skills. This makes them even more vulnerable and puts them at higher risk of experiencing poverty, social exclusion and gender-based violence.

While there is no data on early school leaving of Roma girls, there is data on education levels and labour market participation of Roma men and women which reflects very well the gender gap and particular vulnerable situation of Roma women. Only 16% of Roma women are employed, compared to 34% of Roma men. Furthermore, the NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate of young Roma women aged 16 to 24 is of 72%, while it is 55% of young Roma men.⁸

Whilst many countries acknowledge that Roma women face particular challenges with regards to social inclusion, few of them have incorporated a gender dimension in their NRIS as they are not required to do so by the European Commission, leaving the issue unsolved.

Eurodiaconia members in several countries are running targeted projects supporting Roma girls and women by stimulating democratic participation, combating negative stereotypes, advocating for equal access to services and the labour market, as well as providing education and training opportunities. As Roma women are the ones holding the families together, being responsible for the children and acting as bridges between their community and society, they are also key to addressing Roma families and communities as a whole. Therefore, Eurodiaconia emphasises the importance of recognising and encouraging the potential of Roma women and girls, of promoting awareness of rights and combating anti-gypsyism.

To improve Roma access to healthcare, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Include a gender perspective in the Commission's yearly assessment of the National Roma Integration Strategies;
- Ensure that EU funding is available for targeted measures aiming at empowering Roma women and girls;
- Mainstream a gender perspective throughout the National Roma Integration Strategies and related policies to ensure that particular attention is given to Roma women in all policy areas;
- Take measures to reduce early marriage and school drop out of Roma girls, for example through specific training of Roma mediators, teachers and school assistants who can reach out to the parents and wider Roma communities;
- Provide for sufficient and affordable early childcare in areas with high Roma populations, in order to enable young Roma mothers to complete their education, including secondary and higher education, and enter the labour market;
- Inform Roma women about their rights and put in place appropriate complaint and support mechanisms to ensure that Roma women can file a complaint when their rights are violated.

⁸ Fundamental Rights Agency, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey – Roma – Selected findings, 2016

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

Fighting Anti-Gypsyism

In recent years Anti-Gypsyism has been increasingly recognised as a key obstacle to the long-term inclusion of Roma in society. Its historical roots run deep and continue to divide the largest ethnic minority in Europe from non-Roma citizens. Whilst governments start being aware of the problem and important initiatives have been taken at EU level to address the issue, attitudes within the society are more difficult to change. Unfortunately, Roma reportedly continue to experience segregation, discrimination and violence in all areas of life. At national level, anti-migration and anti-begging laws add to an atmosphere of discrimination, which are targeting in particular Roma that have recently migrated from Central and Eastern Europe to Western and Northern European countries. Roma women are in a particularly difficult position, facing disadvantage both in the majority society and inside the Roma community.

Unlike other forms of racism, Anti-Gypsyism enjoys a relatively high degree of social acceptance: prejudices and discriminatory attitudes are common especially in EU Member States with larger Roma populations, and meet with little resistance as they are often perceived as justified and legitimate. Anti-Gypsyism has an adverse effect on the image of Roma in public discourse, it prevents equal opportunities in education and on the labour market, it obstructs Roma communities' hope for change, and it undermines the political willingness of decision-makers to (openly) take positive action.

In order to tackle Anti-Gypsyism, Eurodiaconia members highlight the importance of addressing and educating the mainstream society about Roma history and culture as part of European history and culture. In addition, they stress the importance of having effective sanction mechanisms to combat discrimination.

To fight Anti-Gypsyism in Europe, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Broaden the scope of the current EU Framework on NRIS by including Anti-Gypsyism as a horizontal aspect for future action;
- Promote awareness-raising activities targeting societal majorities, addressing people's fears and lack of knowledge through education, and strengthen anti-discrimination legislation by making it enforceable through effective sanction mechanisms;
- Promote knowledge about Roma culture through conferences, exhibitions, campaigns and in schools. Increase public awareness of the systematic segregation, discrimination and persecution which Roma have experienced in the past, and continue to experience in the present;
- Increase direct Roma participation in policy-making and public discourse through effective involvement in National Roma Platforms and on all other relevant levels.

Improving stakeholder coordination

Eurodiaconia believes that structural dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders, including (pro-) Roma civil society organisations, is of key importance to promote Roma inclusion in an effective and coherent manner. Eurodiaconia warmly welcomes the European Commission's commitment to dialogue with civil society through its regular consultation meetings and through the restructured format of the European Roma Platform. Over the coming years this process needs to be expanded and strengthened in order to promote greater transparency, improved multi-stakeholder coordination and increased co-ownership.

Eurodiaconia and its members also welcome the establishment of National Roma Platforms to improve dialogue and co-ownership of the Roma

inclusion process at national level. However, a lack of publicly available information is currently preventing them from being as effective and inclusive as they could be; indeed, many (pro-) Roma civil society organisations operating at the national and local level are not aware of the existence of National Roma Platforms and don't know how to get involved. In many cases there is no information available on the Commission website, nor on national government websites. In order to make full use of the opportunity of cooperation through National Roma Platforms, those would need to reach out in a more proactive way to civil society organisations on the field. This could be done with support of the National Roma Contact Points from the European Commission.

To improve Stakeholder Involvement in Europe, Eurodiaconia calls on the EU and national governments to:

- Establish National Roma Platforms in all EU Member States and candidate countries and reach out to (pro-) Roma civil society organisations (CSOs) operating at the national and local level for example by making information about the Platforms available on the website of the Commission and on national websites;
- Make the contents of national progress reports on NRIS implementation publicly accessible to increase transparency and allow for increased coherence with CSO shadow-reporting;
- Call on National Roma Contact Points to ensure meaningful consultation with (pro-) Roma CSOs on the contents of NRIS reporting, ideally through formal Guidelines on Stakeholder Dialogue. At EU level, making meetings between National Roma Contacts Points open to civil society participation to stimulate mutual learning and enhance mutual accountability;
- Facilitate meaningful (pro-) Roma civil society involvement in policy development and monitoring through the continuation of National Roma Platforms and other initiatives, promoting transparency and mutual accountability.

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