



**Commissioner Věra Jourová**  
**European Commission**  
Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and  
Gender Equality

## **Eurodiaconia's recommendations ahead of the European Commission Communication on the assessment of the implementation of the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies.**

Brussels, 30 October 2018

Dear Commissioner Jourová,

On behalf of Eurodiaconia, I hereby contact you to share our analysis and recommendations on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) in view of the upcoming Commission Communication assessing the progress of its implementation.

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. The network represents 47 members working in 32 countries, including churches, not-for-profit organisations and NGOs and has been actively involved in the promotion of Roma inclusion across Europe since 2010. Several Eurodiaconia members, as providers of social and healthcare services, work with Roma communities in the different areas of the EU Framework: education, employment, health and housing as well as the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism. Their activities include shelters and housing support, afterschool educational programmes, vocational training and community-building activities.

Building on our members experience and analysis of the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies, we would like to share with you several key recommendations:

### **1. Put the fight against antigypsyism at the centre of the Communication.**

The mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies has confirmed our member's observations that Roma inclusion has not noticeably improved over the last years. Antigypsyism and discrimination of Roma communities are still wide-spread in European societies and represent a key obstacle to the long-term inclusion of Roma. Antigypsyism prevents opportunities in education, on the labour market, and in accessing a home or healthcare services, it obstructs Roma communities' hope for change, and it undermines the political willingness of decision-makers to take positive action. In the context of rising nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric all over Europe, our members feel that antigypsyism as well is increasing. **Therefore, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to put the fight against antigypsyism at the centre of the Communication and encourage Member States to take horizontal measures to fight antigypsyism in view of creating an inclusive environment and facilitate the integration of Roma in all aspects of life.**

### **2. Establish a clear link between the European Pillar of Social Rights and Roma inclusion.**

One year after the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the rights and principles of the Pillar are not a reality for many Roma across the EU. In many countries, the situation of Roma with regard to most principles, but in particular those related to education, employment, housing or access to essential services is worse than that of the general population. Those principles also have a strong overlap with the EU Framework on NRIS, thus confirming the need of action in these areas. **Therefore, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to align its recommendations with the European Pillar of Social Rights and establish a clear link between the Pillar and the EU Framework on NRIS.**

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### **3. Call on Member States to allocate adequate budgets to their National Roma Integration Strategies.**

Without any doubt the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies has helped raising awareness among political leaders about the need to address Roma inclusion. Eurodiaconia members also warmly welcome the fact that National Roma Integration Strategies, and sometimes even local strategies, have been developed. However, most of the time no or only very small budgets have been allocated to take effective measures to support Roma inclusion, making organisations highly dependent on EU or other project funding. Adequate national budgets for Roma inclusion could allow the setting up of long-term structures and support mechanisms to support the inclusion of Roma in a long-term perspective. **In consequence, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to encourage Member States to allocate adequate budgets for the implementation of their National Roma Integration Strategies.**

### **4. Address segregation and housing exclusion of Roma.**

While Eurodiaconia members are active in supporting Roma to access adequate housing, they observe that in general the housing situation of Roma is hardly improving. Many Roma live in substandard housing and are at risk of eviction. Geographical segregation often leads to segregation in education and thus risks perpetuating social exclusion of the next generation. Especially in countries with big Roma communities, many Roma continue to be strongly disadvantaged and live in segregated areas with poor housing conditions, lacking sometimes running water, sanitation and sewage systems and electricity. **Therefore, the Eurodiaconia network asks the European Commission to call on Member States to facilitate access to adequate and affordable housing for Roma, including the provision of essential services, such as access to water, sewage systems and electricity.**

### **5. Urge Member States to improve access to health insurance and healthcare services.**

Since the launch of the EU Framework for NRIS, Eurodiaconia members notice no significant improvement in the health situation of Roma communities. Roma continue having a lower life expectancy compared with the national average. 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. Furthermore, many Roma are not covered by health insurance and face various difficulties and discrimination in accessing health services. **Eurodiaconia, therefore, asks the European Commission to encourage Member States to improve access to health insurance and healthcare services, with special attention to improving health infrastructure in rural areas.**

### **6. Improve multi-stakeholder coordination and transparency.**

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. Therefore, we welcome the establishment of National Roma Platforms, but regret that a lack of publicly available information is currently preventing many (pro-) Roma civil society organisations of getting involved. **As a result, Eurodiaconia asks the European Commission to continue to facilitate meaningful (pro-) Roma civil society involvement in policy development and monitoring and to call on Member State to improve (pro-) Roma civil society involvement through better information and outreach of National Roma Contact Points and National Roma Platforms.**

We thank you for your interest in our work and for the attention you will be giving to this letter, and in doing so, for the consideration you are giving to our members' work and experience. We hope that you will give the issues highlighted in this letter careful consideration in the preparation of the Commission Communication on the NRIS. My team and I remain available to discuss further these points or how our organisation can support you in working together for better inclusion of Roma in the European Union.

Yours sincerely,

**Heather Roy**

Secretary General, Eurodiaconia