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Addressing EU mobile Roma in a post-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

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. The network represents 49 members working in 32 countries, including churches, not-for-profit welfare organisations and NGOs, committed to promoting social justice. We have been actively involved in the promotion of Roma inclusion across Europe and in supporting vulnerable EU mobile citizens, among whom many are Roma.

Together with our members the Salvation Army, Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Kirkens Korshaer and our partner FEANTSA, we express our deep concern that the particular vulnerabilities faced by EU mobile Roma have not been adequately addressed at the European level nor in the host countries where they reside and hence are often marginalised by national policies. As the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*¹ is coming to an end, we have developed a set of recommendations on how to include EU mobile Roma in a post-2020 EU Framework.

Who are EU mobile Roma?

The term EU mobile Roma refers to mobile EU citizens of Roma ethnicity exercising their right to free movement. Although exact numbers are difficult to gauge, a large percentage of EU mobile Roma are citizens of Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. Their migration to other European countries is often driven by poverty in their own country, economic and social discrimination, including barriers to the labour market and not part of a presumed nomadic life. A consultation carried out by FRA in nine EU countries showed that 80% of the Roma interviewed were at risk of poverty compared to an EU average of 17%.² More specifically, the vulnerability of EU mobile Roma is related to at least six factors concerning their countries of origin: (a) low levels of education and literacy, (b) lack of access to basic needs, adequate health care, social security and housing (c) limited experience in formal work, (d) extreme poverty, (e) lack of documents and (f) the structural problem of Anti-Gypsyism, as

¹ European Commission, *Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020*, 2011. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1444909812175&uri=CELEX:52010DC0133>

² Fundamental Rights Agency, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II): Roma – selected findings*, 2016. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/press-release/2016/80-roma-are-risk-poverty-new-survey-finds>

a specific form of racism towards Roma.³ As a vulnerable group, Roma also face a high risk of trafficking in human beings, in particular children.⁴

While it is important to recognize the diversity of EU mobile Roma and the fact that many, especially Roma with formal education, do not experience obstacles in finding employment in the EU, due to the factors highlighted above, Roma tend to be more vulnerable and more likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion in host countries than other EU mobile citizens. According to Eurocities, their situation is generally also worse than that of the respective national Roma population in the host countries where they settle.⁵ Furthermore, when Roma migrate, they are more likely to end up living in homelessness as they are prone to discrimination and denied access to housing.⁶ Low chances of employability as a consequence of low levels of education often leave Roma exposed to work exploitation in the informal sector. In addition, anti Roma discrimination and campaigning against Roma have increased in destination countries.⁷

Why is it important to address the situation of the EU mobile Roma in the next EU Roma Strategy?

The undersigned organisations welcomed the European Commission's EU Framework and the subsequent development of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) in all EU Member States as a key step to improve Roma inclusion along four integration goals: education, employment, healthcare and housing. However, these strategies have not addressed specific measures for particularly vulnerable groups among Roma. As a consequence, the implementation of NRIS at the national level has focused mainly on national Roma populations, without considering the needs of EU mobile Roma. This conclusion has also been highlighted in the *Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework* which suggests including specific targets and indicators to meet the diversity of the Roma population.⁸

³ Fundamental Rights Agency, *The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States*, 2009. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/705-Roma_Movement_Comparative-final_en.pdf and European Commission, *Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020*, 2018. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0785&from=EN>

⁴ European Commission, *Second report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings (2018) as required under Article 20 of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims*, 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20181204_com-2018-777-report_en.pdf

⁵ Eurocities, *Roma inclusion in cities. Mapping of the situation of Roma in in cities in Europe*, 2017. http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Mapping_of_the_situation_of_Roma_in_cities_FINAL_REPORT.pdf

⁶ Fundamental Rights Agency, *The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States*, 2009. op. cit. and FEANTSA, *The EU Roma Framework beyond 2020. A homelessness service providers perspective*, 2019. <https://www.feantsa.org/en/feantsa-position/2019/03/22/the-eu-roma-framework-beyond-2020-a-homelessness-service-providers-perspective>

⁷ Fundamental Rights Agency, *The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States*, 2009. op. cit

⁸ Ibid

How should EU mobile Roma be addressed in the next EU Roma strategy?

Many of the difficulties which EU mobile Roma face are similar to those faced by other EU mobile citizens. However, their heightened vulnerability — related to poverty and anti-gypsyism confronted over generations — accentuates the difficulties they face and puts them at a higher risk of experiencing worse forms of destitution, while making it more challenging to overcome the situation. Therefore, the measures needed to facilitate their inclusion need to be a mixture of mainstream measures to facilitate the integration of EU mobile citizens and targeted measures to improve the situation of EU mobile Roma in particular.

In order to achieve this, the European Commission should include EU mobile Roma as a particular target group that needs to be addressed in National Roma Integration Strategies (or similar frameworks targeted at EU mobile Roma) and supported by hosting Member States through mainstream policies as well as targeted measures.

The following recommendations outline some of the particular challenges that EU mobile Roma face and suggest measures that the next EU Roma Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies could include to improve their situation.

1. Improving access to social rights

EU mobile Roma face particular difficulties in accessing their social rights as EU citizens. This is partly due to low literacy rates and lack of knowledge of their rights, but also due to a lack of trust in public authorities and the rule of law as a result of negative experiences in their countries of origin. They might also have experienced anti-gypsyism when in contact with public authorities in the hosting country and therefore be reluctant to make further contact.

Social services should therefore be set up by municipalities in cooperation with NGOs to support EU mobile citizens in accessing their social rights. The services should include outreach to vulnerable EU mobile Roma, information about their rights and support for EU mobile Roma in accessing those rights related to education, employment, health and housing. Among the possible measures, low threshold activities would be particularly well suited to provide information, build trust and to empower the target group.

2. Facilitating the registration process

In several member states, EU mobile citizens face difficulties related to the registration process as a result of restrictive practices applied by national authorities (see ECAS 2018 Report⁹ and FEANTSA EU Free Movement Fitness Check Reports¹⁰). Roma are particularly affected by these

⁹ ECAS, *Freedom of Movement in the EU: A Look Behind The Curtain*, 2018. <https://ecas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ECAS-Long-report-final.pdf>

¹⁰FEANTSA, *EU Free Movement Fitness Check Reports*, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2018/09/10/eu-free-movement-fitness-check-reports?bcParent=27>

practices and in many cases easily discouraged by difficulties encountered while dealing with local authorities and the complexity of registering their residence in the destination country.

Member states should facilitate the registration process, including for jobseekers, in order to reduce the risk of ending up destitute and unable to access key social supports — as often happens in countries like Sweden and Denmark where you cannot register and obtain a personal number if you are unable to show a work contract which proves you have secured a job and that the job is guaranteed for a certain amount of time. The inability to register their residency then tends to have a ‘domino effect’ on their ability to enjoy key civil, political, economic and social rights.¹¹

3. Providing access to employment services

The majority of EU mobile Roma move to other EU countries or those outside the EU such as Norway with the aim of finding work. Despite their right to move to another EU country as jobseekers, they face many difficulties in accessing employment services and support. In some countries there is a high risk of ending up in a catch 22 situation (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Norway) as it is necessary to have a personal identification number in order to access employment services, but the person needs a job in order to obtain a personal number.

The next EU Roma Strategy should therefore encourage member states to allow EU mobile citizens to access upskilling and basic training programs, which would improve their employability. Member states should also develop procedures to recognize the informal skills of EU mobile citizens, which would highly benefit EU mobile Roma.

4. Recognizing the status of a worker for all employment contracts

Several member states only recognize working contracts that include a minimum amount of hours, however, for many EU mobile Roma the first employment opportunities are short-term, precarious, and with limited working hours. This often prevents them from registering and accessing their social rights, despite demonstrating a clear intent to work.

Therefore, the next EU Roma strategy should encourage member states to recognize all types of employment contracts. Short-term or more casual forms of employment contracts should also lead to the recognition of the worker status.

5. Support housing solutions

Roma are particularly affected by inadequate housing conditions, such as overcrowding and the lack of access to sanitation. In addition, they face discrimination in public and private housing markets as well as evictions and forced relocations. EU mobile Roma are at a higher risk of homelessness and housing exclusion, partly due to the abovementioned limitations in effectively exercising their right

¹¹ Fundamental Rights Agency, *The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States*, 2009. op. cit., p. 7.

to free movement.¹² Therefore, the recommendations on improving the registration process and on facilitating the obtention of a worker status would contribute to tackling housing exclusion of EU mobile Roma.

In addition, the next EU Roma strategy should put forward housing solutions benefiting all Roma, such as (a) creating conditions for mainstreaming housing policies to include Roma, (b) strengthening social rental agencies and other housing solutions that address the housing needs of this vulnerable group, and (c) the provision of protection against unlawful evictions.¹³ While homelessness experienced by EU mobile Roma is absent in the current EU framework, it is of great relevance for tackling their exclusion. Particular focus and resources should be given to organisations that provide homelessness services to Roma and are crucial in meeting the most basic needs of the homeless. In addition, the European Commission should develop indicators on housing exclusion and homelessness and monitoring mechanisms to measure the progress at the local level.¹⁴

6. Use EU funding to support EU mobile Roma¹⁵

The problems faced by EU mobile Roma are closely related to challenges in the functioning of the single market and dysfunctional aspects of EU citizenship; hence there is a European responsibility to support EU citizens that face multiple vulnerabilities and are at a particular risk of falling through the system.

EU funds, such as the ESF+ should provide targeted support to EU mobile citizens and EU mobile Roma in particular, in order to avoid that they end up destitute. NRIS should incorporate specific goals, budgeting and follow-up mechanisms to address EU mobile Roma. To better support the capacities of civil society organisations working with EU mobile Roma on the ground, EU funding should also be made directly accessible to grassroots organisations.

7. Address anti-gypsyism

Anti-Gypsyism is increasingly recognised as a key obstacle to the sustainable inclusion of Roma in society. Its historical roots run deep and continue to divide the largest ethnic minority in Europe from non-Roma citizens. Unlike other forms of racism, it enjoys a relatively high degree of social acceptance: prejudices and discriminatory attitudes are common and meet with little resistance as they are often perceived as justified and legitimate.¹⁶

¹² FEANTSA, *Effectively tackling Homelessness amongst Mobile EU citizens*. <https://www.feantsa.org/download/effectively-tackling-homelessness-amongst-mobile-eu-citizens7332890560782313964.pdf>

¹³ FEANTSA, *The EU Roma Framework beyond 2020. A homelessness service providers perspective*, 2019. op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ EURoma/Fundación Secretariado Gitano, *Promoting the use of ESI Funds for Roma Inclusion*. https://www.euromanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/EURoma-Report_Promoting-Use-of-ESI-Funds-for-Roma-Inclusion_Executive_Summary_Full-Report.pdf

¹⁶ Eurodiaconia, *Eurodiaconia Guidelines on tackling Anti-Gypsyism*, 2017. https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/Eurodiaconia_Guidelines_Antigypsyism.pdf

Whilst important initiatives have been taken at EU level to address the issue, Roma continue to experience discrimination, segregation and violence. Anti-Gypsyism has an adverse effect on the image of Roma in public discourse, as it prevents equal opportunities in education and on the labour market, obstructs Roma communities' hope for change, and undermines the political willingness of decision-makers to (openly) take positive action.

The next EU Roma strategy should urge member states to develop laws against hate speech and facilitate the setting up of mechanisms in member states where hate speech and hate crime towards Roma could be reported and appropriate remedies taken. As recommended in a recent S&D report on the fight against anti-gypsyism, equality bodies should also be given more authority and sufficient resources to be able to monitor and take appropriate actions when confronted with cases of anti-gypsyism; and the next EU framework for national Roma Strategies should include anti-discrimination indicators in sectors like employment, health, education, housing, and access to justice.¹⁷ In line with the report Member states should also guarantee that Roma are treated equally before the law by providing training to law enforcement officials. In addition, the prevention of discrimination should be also be addressed from the perspective of education, for example by incorporating the history of (national) minorities such as Roma in education plans.¹⁸ This would also help to increase the mutual knowledge of common history of Roma and non-Roma in Europe.¹⁹

¹⁷ Socialists & Democrats, *The milestones in our fight against anti-gypsyism*, 2018.

https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/S%26D%20-%20Anti-Gypsyism%20publication_A4_V09-FINAL_pbp.pdf

¹⁸ OHCHR, *Convention of the Rights of the Child*, 1990. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁹ Council of Europe, *Education of Roma children*. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoCulture_en.asp

List of Signatories

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