Understanding EU action on Roma inclusion

SUMMARY

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. Out of an estimated total of 10 to 12 million Roma in Europe as a whole, some 6 million live in the European Union (EU), most of whom are citizens of an EU Member State. A significant number of Roma people live in very poor socio-economic conditions. The social exclusion, discrimination and segregation they face are mutually reinforcing. Their restricted access to education, and difficulties in entering the labour market, result in low income and poor health compared with non-Roma people.

Since the mid-1990s, the European Union has stressed the need for better Roma inclusion. In 2011, a key EU initiative emerged with the adoption of an EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020, aimed at tackling the socio-economic exclusion of, and discrimination against, Roma by promoting equal access in four key areas: education, employment, health, and housing. As the framework had come to an end, the Commission adopted ‘A union of equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation’ (2021-2030) in early October 2020. Through this new strategy, Member States are invited to tackle the disproportionate impact of the pandemic. In March 2021, the Council adopted a recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, replacing an earlier one from 2013. This recommendation encourages Member States to adopt strategic frameworks for the inclusion of Roma communities. The EU also supports Member States in their duty to improve the lives of all vulnerable people, including Roma people, through the European structural and investment funds and other funding instruments.

Issues relating to the promotion of democratic values and practices towards Roma, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights, have received particular attention from civil society organisations, while Parliament has been advocating for Roma inclusion since the 1990s.

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Background

The umbrella-term 'Roma' is commonly used in EU policy terminology. It encompasses several groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.).

As stated in the Council of Europe report on Promoting the inclusion of Roma and Travellers, there is a significant lack of data on Roma people, which can be explained by three main elements:

- Some Roma people are nomads and may be missing during collection of data.
- Some Member States do not define Roma people as an ethnic minority.
- Studies show that minority groups often refuse to declare that they are from a different ethnic background than the national majoritarian one, fearing discrimination.

The Roma people are Europe's largest ethnic minority. According to the Council of Europe data, of an estimated 10 to 12 million in Europe, some 6 million Roma people live in the EU, most holding EU citizenship. The estimated share of Roma people in the various Member States ranges from 10.3 % in Bulgaria, 9.1 % in Slovakia, 8.3 % in Romania, 7 % in Hungary, 2.5 % in Greece, 2 % in Czechia and 1.6 % in Spain, to less than 1 % in most of the other EU Member States. According to 2009 data, Roma people tend to be younger (25.1 years old) than the EU population average (40.2 years old).

A lack of data on Roma people makes it difficult to obtain an exact picture of their socio-economic situation in the EU (see box). Nevertheless, in 2016, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a comprehensive survey, aligned with a previous survey carried out in 2011. The studies focus on poverty and social exclusion, labour market participation, education and discrimination.

Poverty and social exclusion

According to the above-mentioned FRA survey, in 2016, 8 out of 10 Roma were living on an income below the respective national at-risk-of-poverty threshold. On average, a quarter of Roma people (27 %) and one third of Roma children (30 %) were living in a household that had faced hunger at least once in the previous month. Almost half have limited or no access to drinking water, sanitation or electricity. Roma people’s life expectancy is, on average, 10 years below that of the general population in the countries where they live, with a high proportion of long-standing chronic illnesses. Moreover, Roma people encounter barriers to accessing healthcare services, as few have health insurance and most live in segregated areas.

Labour market participation

According to the 2016 FRA survey, only one in four Roma aged 16 years or over was employed or self-employed (25 %). Roma women reported much lower employment rates than Roma men: 16 % compared with 34 %. The paid work rate for Roma aged 20 to 64 years is 43 %, much lower than the EU average (70 % at the time). The situation of young Roma people was significantly worse. On average, 63 % of Roma aged 16 to 24 were not employed, in education or training (NEET) at the time of the survey, compared with a 12 % EU average for the same age group. For this age group, the gender gap was substantial: 72 % of young Roma women were not employed, in education or training, compared with 55 % of young Roma men.

Education

Roma children lag behind non-Roma children at all levels of education. Only half (53 %) of Roma children between the ages of 4 and 6 (or the starting age of compulsory primary education)
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participate in early childhood education. While 9 out of 10 Roma children aged between 7 and 15 are reported as attending school (94 %), participation in education decreases significantly after compulsory schooling: only 15 % of young Roma adults surveyed completed upper-secondary education. As a result, on average, 18 % of Roma aged between 6 and 24 attend an educational level lower than that corresponding to their age. The number of Roma early school-leavers is disproportionately high compared with the general EU population. Moreover, school segregation remains a particular problem in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia, despite the legal prohibition of this practice and recent case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Discrimination

Roma face high levels of discrimination in all spheres of life – whether looking for work, at work, in education, in healthcare, trying to buy or rent a house, in contact with an administration or entering a shop. Some 4 out of 10 Roma (41 %) have felt discriminated against because of their ethnic origin at least once in one of these areas of daily life in the past 5 years. A quarter of the respondents (26 %) state that the most recent incident of perceived discrimination happened in the 12 months preceding the survey. The highest frequency of discrimination is found when using public or private services (19 %) and looking for a job (16 %). Nevertheless, on average, only 1 in 10 Roma (12 %) who felt discriminated against report their experiences to an authority. Moreover, a quarter (27 %) of the Roma surveyed do not know that there is a law prohibiting discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. Most Roma (82 %) are not aware of the existence of organisations offering support and advice to victims of discrimination. According to the third Eurobarometer survey on the perception of Roma in the general European population, the acceptance of Roma in daily life has improved since 2011. In 2019, 64 % of respondents would feel comfortable working with a Roma colleague, while almost half (48 %) would welcome a Roma person as the partner of their children. However, 61 % of Europeans think that discrimination against Roma is widespread in their country.

EU legal framework

The Treaty on European Union (TEU) defines equality and respect for human rights – including the rights of persons belonging to minorities – as EU shared values (Article 2 TEU). The fight against social exclusion and discrimination and the promotion of economic prosperity, social cohesion and solidarity between Member States feature among the EU’s common objectives (Article 3 TEU). The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides the legal basis for EU action to combat discrimination based on six grounds, including racial or ethnic origin (Article 19 TFEU). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including race and ethnic origin (Article 21). It also ensures the protection of the rights of the child (Article 24).

The Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) prohibits discrimination including harassment based on racial or ethnic origin in key fields including employment, education, healthcare and housing. It introduces the concepts of indirect discrimination (see box) and endorses

Direct and indirect discrimination

According to the Racial Equality Directive, direct discrimination takes place when ‘one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on grounds of racial or ethnic origin’ (Article 2 (2)a). In education, direct discrimination can be identified when there is unjustified placement of Roma children in special schools for children with disabilities or segregating Roma from non-Roma classrooms because of their ethnic origin.

In contrast, indirect discrimination occurs when ‘an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons’ (Article 2 (2)b). In fact, school segregation is often the result of indirect discrimination (Council of Europe, 2017). For example, it can include cases of Roma-only classes and schools located in neighbourhoods where Roma become over-represented. However, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that ‘a lack of discriminatory intent is not sufficient. The States are under a positive obligation to take positive effective measures against segregation (Lavida and others v Greece, 30 August 2013).

the principle of positive action. The directive has become a major source of further legal and policy provisions shaping equality policies in various policy domains at both EU and national level. The Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law (2008/913/JHA) obliges Member States to criminalise hate speech and hate crime, including against Roma.

The directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (2012/29/EU) pays particular attention to victims who have suffered from biased or discrimination-motivated crimes. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018/1808/EC) calls upon Member States to ensure that audiovisual media services do not contain incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of a group based on any of the grounds referred to in Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (see above). The directive also requires Member States to ensure that media service providers do not include or promote discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin. On 9 December 2021, the Commission published the communication ‘A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime’, inviting the Council to adopt a decision identifying hate speech and hate crime (to which Roma people are subjected) as another area of crime meeting the criteria set out in Article 83(1) TFEU. A proposal for such a Council decision is annexed to the communication. If adopted, the Commission may make a proposal based on Article 83 TFEU for a directive on minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in this area of crime.

**EU policies**

The EU Member States bear primary responsibility for improving the living conditions and inclusion of Roma people, while the EU acts as coordinator. The past two decades have seen major progress in the establishment of EU policies for Roma inclusion.

**First initiatives**

As early as the second half of the 1990s, the European Commission called for national measures in accession countries with large Roma populations to scale up the social integration of Roma people. In 2000, the Commission called for the transposition of the Race Equality Directive. In December 2007, the European Council acknowledged, for the first time, that the Roma faced a very specific situation across the EU and called upon Member States and the EU to use all means to improve their inclusion. In July 2008, the Commission adopted a communication on non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment, stressing that the tools for advancing the social integration of the Roma had to be applied in a better way. Launched for the first time in 2008, the European Roma summits aim to support and promote a joint commitment by the Member States, the EU institutions and civil society. In its 2010 communication on the economic and social integration of the Roma in Europe, the Commission stressed anew the need for better Roma integration.

**EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020**

In 2011, as a response to the controversial evictions and expulsions of mobile EU Roma citizens the previous year in France and Italy, and while the FRA revealed the striking marginalisation and discrimination faced by Roma people in the above-mentioned 2011 survey, the Commission adopted an EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020, aiming to tackle the socio-economic exclusion of and discrimination against Roma by promoting equal access to four key areas: education, employment, health, and housing. Member States were called upon to ensure that all Roma children completed primary school and to close the gaps between Roma and non-Roma with respect to employment, health, housing and public utilities (water, electricity, etc.).

The Commission proposed the adoption of national Roma integration strategies (NRISs), to ensure that Member States implemented effective policies. The EU NRIS framework encouraged Member States and enlargement countries to adopt a comprehensive approach to Roma integration and
socio-economic inclusion, mainstream Roma inclusion using policy, legal and funding instruments, adopt NRISSs, and set up coordination, consultation and monitoring mechanisms. At EU level, in October 2012, the Commission strengthened its dialogue with Member States on Roma integration, in particular by establishing the network of national Roma contact points (NRCPs). Since 2010, the European Commission has organised an annual European Roma platform, a two-day international conference in Brussels that brings together representatives from the EU institutions, national governments, local authorities and Roma civil society organisations.

In 2013, the EU framework was strengthened by a Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. The document placed a stronger focus on two horizontal areas: anti-discrimination and poverty reduction. It also introduced, as of 2016, an annual reporting obligation for Member States, to improve the EU monitoring system. The December 2016 Council conclusions on accelerating Roma integration confirmed the Member States' commitment.

EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030

As the EU framework for Roma integration ended in 2020, the European Commission adopted the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030 on 7 October 2020. The new 10-year plan was announced in the Commission work programme as one of the equality and non-discrimination initiatives under ‘A new push for European democracy’. The non-legislative strategy draws on policy learnings from the previous framework and is adapted to the new challenges of the pandemic. It reflects findings from consultations and evaluations conducted by the Commission using information from each country, and from non-governmental and international organisations and the FRA. Both the European Court of Auditors (2016) and the FRA (2020) had pointed to the need for disaggregated data by ethnic origin to evaluate the impact of Roma-targeted policies, in particular desegregation measures in housing and education. The Commission’s final assessment of the previous framework concluded that it had improved political commitment and financial support at national level, but overall progress on Roma integration had been limited since 2011. An EPRS implementation assessment, summarising opinions on the previous framework, highlighted a general consensus that the non-binding nature of the framework was a key weakness.

The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030 includes a three-pillar approach aimed at fostering equality, inclusion and participation, in addition to the pre-existing four-sector approach (education, employment, housing, and health). The objective is to complement the previous socio-economic inclusion approach with the promotion of equality with a focus on the fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism and the promotion of Roma participation in political, economic and cultural life. In addition, the Commission added a new approach to intersectionality, to address the needs and disadvantages of the various Roma groups.

While the new framework remains non-binding, the Commission has stepped up EU monitoring and implementation to support Member States. In the framework of the EU action plan against racism (see box below), it also committed to ensure the effective implementation of EU law on equality and against racism and xenophobia, bringing more infringement procedures if needed. The new EU framework also reflects the need to revise the objectives to make them ‘more specific, measurable and realistic’ and sets new EU measurable headline targets to improve data collection, reporting and monitoring, with a new portfolio of indicators and objectives: the 2020 monitoring framework.

On 12 March 2021, the Council adopted a recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, stepping up the Member States’ commitment to fight discrimination against Roma people effectively and to promote their inclusion in the key areas of education, employment, health and housing. The 2021 recommendation, replacing the 2013 version, has an expanded scope, including measures to fight online and off-line discrimination, combat multiple and structural
discrimination against Roma, in particular women, children, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities, and promote multi-cultural awareness-raising activities and campaigns in schools.

The recommendation highlights the importance of the equal participation of Roma in society and of their role in policy-making. Moreover, it stresses the need for a stronger gender perspective. According to the recommendation, Member States should adopt national Roma strategic frameworks within their broader social inclusion policies to improve the situation of Roma people, and communicate them to the European Commission, preferably by September 2021. Member States are also encouraged to include and promote the rights of and equal opportunities for Roma people in their national recovery and resilience plans.

**EU action plan against racism 2020-2025**

The Commission adopted its [EU action plan against racism](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en) on 18 September 2020. It announced a series of legislative and non-legislative measures to step up action and to bring together actors at all levels to address racism more effectively in the EU for the next five years. This was not initially part of the Commission's work programme. However, action was clearly needed in the face of the harsh impact of the pandemic on racial minorities and the demands from Europe's Black Lives Matter protests against racial profiling and race-based police violence ([ENAR 2020](https://www.enar.org/)). For the first time, the Commission stated that the existence of structural racism needed to be acknowledged. The communication addresses better enforcement of EU law, the appointment of an anti-racism coordinator for closer contact with stakeholders, the reinforcement of national level action, the promotion of fair policing and protection to prevent discriminatory attitudes by law enforcement authorities, increased racial diversity among EU staff, work on awareness raising, and improved collection of data disaggregated by ethnic or racial origin. The new EU strategic framework on Roma (2020-2030) should directly contribute to the implementation of the EU action plan against racism.


**EU funding**

The EU helps Member States in their duty to improve the lives of all vulnerable people, including Roma people, through the European structural and investment funds and other instruments.

**The 2014-2020 European structural and investment funds**

The [EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en) identified the European structural and investment funds ([ESIF](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en)) as key financial resources to address the needs of Roma, and invited Member States to amend their operational programmes co-financed by ESI funds and align them with their national Roma integration strategies.

The 2014-2020 [European structural and investment funds regulations](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en) covered a range of cross-cutting measures promoting the inclusion of marginalised communities such as the Roma. In the [Common Provisions Regulation](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en) (CPR), particular attention was paid to the issue of discrimination and exclusion. In addition to these cross-cutting measures, the legislative package for EU cohesion policy outlined some objectives specifically targeting marginalised communities. Under the European Social Fund ([ESF](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en)), it established a specific investment priority (9.2) on the integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma. Two European Regional Development Fund ([ERDF](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en)) investment priorities also targeted this group ([Investment in health and social infrastructure to improve access to health and social services](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en), and [Support for physical and economic regeneration of deprived urban and rural communities](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=621&langId=en)). Moreover, a minimum of 20 % of each Member State's ESF allocation had to be set aside for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, with housing support available as part of integrated intervention under the ERDF.

According to the European Commission, the specific investment priority (9.2) on Roma integration allowed 10 Member States to programme more than €1.5 billion for the integration of marginalised communities, including Roma. By the end of 2019, 3.9 million participants who were migrants, of a foreign background or part of a marginalised community, such as the Roma, had received ESF support. In parallel, several key Roma integration actions (access to inclusive early childhood...
education and care, primary education, infrastructure in health and social services, regeneration of deprived urban and rural areas, non-segregated housing actions) were financed by the ERDF: €21.5 billion was allocated to those measures during the 2014-2020 period.

**Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and other funding instruments**

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) is intended to promote and enhance social inclusion and therefore ultimately contribute to the goal of eradicating poverty in the EU. It seeks to alleviate the worst forms of poverty by providing non-financial assistance for the most deprived, including Roma people, in conjunction with other EU funds, such as the ESF (see above), and with Member States’ national poverty eradication and social inclusion policies.

The EU contribution to the FEAD was more than €3.8 billion (in current prices) for the 2014-2020 programming period. In addition, Member States co-financed at least 15 % of the costs of their national operational programmes (around €674 million), bringing the total resources channelled through the fund to approximately €4.5 billion. The principal actions undertaken under the fund were: food support; material assistance; accompanying measures to alleviate adversity through advice and guidance, and social inclusion activities.

Other funding opportunities were found under different programmes, including:

- the Erasmus+ programme, which supported projects on lifelong learning for Roma integration through education;
- the EU health programme, which financed initiatives for equal access to health care;
- the culture programme, which provided funding for projects that promote intercultural dialogue with the Roma and other communities;
- the rights, equality and citizenship programme, which financed projects aimed at promoting equality and the rights of persons;
- the employment and social innovation programme (EaSI), which promoted quality and sustainable employment, combated poverty and social exclusion, and fought to improve working conditions.

**2021-2027 EU cohesion policy legislative package**

With regard to policy objectives, the 2021-2027 Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) emphasises the need to use the funds to make Europe more 'social and inclusive implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights'. It also stresses that the country-specific recommendations from the European Semester process should be taken into account in how the funds are spent.

For the 2021-2027 programming period, a specific objective, Article 5(1)(d), under the CPR policy objective ‘a more social and inclusive Europe’, will allow Member States to carry out long-term programming and targeted measures on access to health, housing, education, employment and social services for the Roma population, as well as specific measures on fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) budget of €99.3 billion for the 2021-2027 period also addresses key social inclusion areas, allocating specific percentages to address the difficulties, which particularly affect Roma people.

- Funds specifically allocated to social inclusion should reach at least 25 % of total resources, intensifying the social dimension of the ESF+ and compelling Member States to address vulnerability.
- Some 12.5 % of ESF+ resources should address youth employment measures, education and training, focusing on reducing the NEET rate in those countries where it is above the European average. According to Eurostat, the current average NEET rate in the EU is 12.2 % for men and up to 18.0 % for women.
At least 5% of the ESF+ budget can be devoted to measures for reducing child poverty. Countries with a child poverty rate higher than the EU average of 22.5% may devote 5% of their ESF+ budget to child poverty reduction measures. In 4 countries, the share of the population aged under 18 years at risk of poverty is over 22.5% (Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg), and in Romania, it is over 30%.

Furthermore, 3% of the total budget can be allocated to the FEAD through basic material assistance and food to address severe deprivation.

EU response to the pandemic

Impact of the pandemic on the Roma population

According to a study published by the European Commission and another by the FRA, Roma communities have been disproportionately affected both by the pandemic and the measures to contain the spread of Covid-19. As regards employment, the pandemic aggravated the situation: many of those employed in the informal economy or doing seasonal work lost their jobs due to lockdowns, restrictions on movement and business closures. Their precarious work position and lack of a formal residential address often excluded them from social security benefits, while most employment support measures adopted to mitigate the impact of the crisis did not explicitly target or include them.

At the same time, many Roma children, especially those living in substandard housing, do not have access to home internet or computers. As a result, they have not been able to benefit from online distance learning, widening the already high education gap between them and other pupils.

Roma living in informal settlements and encampments can face overcrowded housing and insanitary conditions, making it difficult for them to comply with hygiene, social distancing and isolation requirements. Almost half of them have limited or no access to drinking water, sanitation or electricity. Furthermore, numerous forced evictions have also been reported since the beginning of the pandemic.

Roma face higher risks of contracting the virus and also of developing health complications and suffering premature death, owing to a high proportion of long-standing chronic illnesses. They encounter barriers to healthcare services, as few have health insurance and most live in segregated areas. They are now at even greater risk of malnutrition than before the pandemic.

During the height of the pandemic, some Member States placed discriminatory restrictions on their Roma communities in the form of stricter lockdowns, exceeding the precautionary principle (e.g. walls built, roadblocks put in place, drones used for surveillance purposes or policed checkpoints established to prevent residents from entering and leaving Roma villages). Moreover, the fear engendered by the pandemic often fuelled anti-Gypsyism discourse, discrimination and anti-Roma rhetoric across the media and social networks, sometimes echoed by public authorities themselves.

Addressing the impact of the pandemic on the Roma population

Targeted measures for vulnerable groups, including Roma

In April 2020, Commissioners Helena Dalli for Equality, Stella Kyriakides for Health and Food Safety and Nicolas Schmit for Jobs and Social Rights sent a letter to the Member States on behalf of the European Commission, emphasising the need for targeted measures for vulnerable groups, including the Roma. Given the high risk faced by these groups, the three Commissioners drew attention to the need to provide food and drinking water for all, and the delivery of key sanitation products and medicines. They pointed out that the pandemic had exacerbated pre-existing racial discrimination and recommended that governments ensure the wide dissemination of information on the pandemic to both racial minorities and the majority population, to avoid the scapegoating of minority individuals.
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Funding initiatives to support Roma and Traveller communities

To respond to the health and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, the Commission adapted the rules of the relevant funding programmes as follows:

- In April 2020, the Commission launched the coronavirus response investment initiative (CRII), complemented by the coronavirus response investment initiative plus (CRII+). The flexibility built into the package allowed Member States to rapidly mobilise unused resources from the EU cohesion policy funds (in principle, the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund) in order to implement their immediate and long-term crisis responses. That way, some €37 billion that had remained unspent over the 2014-2020 programming period was channelled to mitigating the effects of the pandemic, including for disadvantaged groups such as the Roma.

- On 27 May 2020, the Commission complemented these initiatives with the new package of recovery assistance for cohesion and the territories of Europe (REACT-EU), launched as part of the emergency temporary recovery Next Generation EU instrument. REACT-EU made €55 billion of additional resources available to the cohesion policy funds and to the FEAD in 2020-2022.

- The scope of the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) – a tool supporting countries hit by natural disasters – was extended to cover major public health emergencies and provided additional assistance of up to €800 million to those Member States worst affected by the pandemic.

Stakeholders

Issues relating to the promotion of democratic values and practices towards Roma people, and their economic, social and cultural rights, have received particular attention from civil society organisations and other stakeholders. At EU level, the European platform for Roma inclusion, set up in 2009, is a forum for debate and concerted action by all relevant stakeholders: EU institutions, national governments, international organisations, academics and Roma civil society representatives.

The emerging data showing the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Roma people has been noted by several organisations, including the Open Society Foundations, which warned from the start that Roma communities faced a much higher risk of death from Covid-19. According to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Roma have been severely impacted both by the virus itself and by repressive responses from governments. When it comes to treatment and vaccination of Roma people, ideological issues such as anti-Gypsyism also impact health and social workers’ practices and government policies. With the exception of Slovakia, Roma are not mentioned as a risk group in national vaccination roll-out plans.

Another issue dominating recent debates has been anti-Gypsyism. According to the Alliance against Antigypsyism, anti-Gypsyism is neither the result of the poor living conditions in which many Roma people to live, nor a ‘minority issue’, but deeply rooted in social stereotypes. In its policy paper ‘Developing measures to combat antigypsyism after 2020’, ERGO Network states that ‘anti-Gypsyism is the root cause of exclusion of Romani people’ and that it cannot be simply treated as a thematic issue, alongside housing, education, health and employment, but rather needs to be dealt with as ‘an integral part of thematic policies’. In the same vein, Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE) set up a programme ‘Freedom from hate: Empowering civil society to counter cyberhate against Roma’ to evaluate effective counter-narrative campaigns targeting online hate speech against Roma communities in Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia, and across Europe. The organisation underlines the need to further develop effective approaches to combating ‘anti-Gypsyism’ and promoting public participation of Roma on the internet and social media.
A further focus for stakeholders is **respect for Roma rights**. Since its establishment in 1996, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) has endeavoured to provide Roma people with the necessary tools to combat discrimination and achieve equal access to justice, education, housing, healthcare and public services. The ERRC campaigns, in particular, for effective state responses to violence and hate speech against Roma, school desegregation, anti-Gypsyism, forced evictions and other housing rights abuse, or to promote Romani women’s rights. Most recently, the ERRC has drawn attention to the particularly difficult situation of Ukrainian Roma since the start of the Russia’s war in Ukraine (see box below).

Regarding the **framework for Roma inclusion**, the ERRC considers that the new EU Roma framework ‘falls short on police brutality, justice and segregation’. According to the EERC, the new strategy ‘does little to address police misconduct against Roma, lack of access to justice for Romani citizens, and the persistent segregation of Romani schoolchildren. It additionally remains toothless in terms of lack of conditionality of funding as well as its mechanisms, including the Racial Equality Directive, which are unfit for purpose when it comes to protecting the rights of Romani EU citizens’.

Stakeholders also highlight the importance of addressing the specific situations and needs of **Roma children and students**. In 2021, in the context of the pandemic, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) launched an awareness-raising campaign ‘Dare to share their dreams’, which focuses on difficulties faced by Roma students in exercising their right to study and promotes their entitlement to a quality education. The ERGO Network also condemns segregated schools for Roma children, which encourage a sectioned view of society and fuel inequalities and discrimination, and pleads for an inclusive education, as does the Roma Education Fund (ERF), which is dedicated to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma people.

Roma people in Russia’s war on Ukraine

There is a lack of official data on the exact numbers of Roma people in Ukraine. According to the official All-Ukrainian 2001 census, there were some 47,587 Roma living in Ukraine, out of a population of approximately 48.5 million people. Other sources suggest there may be between 120,000 and 400,000 Roma spread across the country. There are three main explanations for the disparity between the official and unofficial figures: 1) in some areas, many Roma do not have personal documents and, thus, are not registered in the country; 2) the reluctance of Roma to declare their ethnic origin fearing discrimination; 3) the incorrect recording by the authorities of ‘Roma’ as ‘Romanians’.

The Roma population as a whole is believed to be the **most vulnerable minority group in Ukraine**. Civil society organisations have highlighted high levels of poverty among Roma and discrimination against the Romani people. According to the European Network on Statelessness, around 10 to 20% of the estimated 400,000 Romani people living in Ukraine lack the civil documentation needed to acquire or confirm their Ukrainian citizenship and to prove their residence status. Since the beginning of the conflict, Ukrainian Roma fleeing the war have been facing border-crossing issues such as discrimination, segregation or denied access to neighbouring countries owing to a lack of documentation to prove their residence status.

European Parliament

Since the mid-1990s, Parliament has prioritised the fight against all forms of discrimination against Roma people, not least through its Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI), which promotes racial equality and counter racism, and educates about non-discrimination. In a first ‘resolution on discrimination against the Roma’ adopted on 13 July 1995, the European Parliament called on the European institutions and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to work together to combat discrimination against the Roma people. In 2005, Parliament strongly condemned all forms of discrimination faced by the Roma people and called on the European institutions, the Member States and the candidate countries to consider recognising the Roma as a European minority. In this resolution, the European Parliament was the first institution to use the term ‘anti-Gypsyism’ in an official EU document.
In 2006, Parliament stressed that Roma women were among the most threatened groups and individuals in the EU. In this resolution, Members called for measures to combat the high levels of multiple discrimination faced by these women on the grounds of both ethnicity and gender and, among other areas of concern, to ensure that all Roma women had access to health care. In its 2009 resolution on the social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU, Parliament considered that there was a need for a coordinated approach to improve the working and living conditions of the Roma community, one aimed at increasing economic opportunities for the Roma, building human capital, and strengthening social capital and community development.

On 9 September 2010, in the context of the repatriations and returns of Roma that had taken place in several Member States, Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation of Roma and on freedom of movement in the European Union, which stressed that mass expulsions are prohibited by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and that such measures are in violation of the EU Treaties and EU law. Members of the Parliament also considered that the EU and all Member States shared responsibility to promote the inclusion of Roma people and that this required a comprehensive approach at EU level in the form of an EU Roma strategy.

In its 2013 resolution on progress made in the implementation of national Roma integration strategies, Parliament condemned the ethnic profiling and illegal expulsions, police abuse and human rights violations against Roma in EU Member States, asking the Commission to set up an EU-wide monitoring mechanism. In a separate resolution on gender aspects of the European framework of national Roma inclusion strategies, Parliament deplored the discrimination faced by Roma women on the grounds of gender and ethnicity and called on Member States to focus on empowering Roma women in their national strategies.

With the European Parliament resolution of 15 April 2015, on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II, Parliament expressed its deep concern at the rise of anti-Gypsyism, and demanded greater efforts to end discrimination, hate crime and hate speech against Roma. It recognised the genocide and called on Member States to do the same. It also declared that ‘a European day should be dedicated to commemorating the victims of the genocide of the Roma during World War II’, to be called ‘European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day’. In the European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2017, on Fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU: fighting anti-Gypsyism, Parliament urged the Commission to set up a ‘truth and reconciliation commission’ at EU level and called on Member States to mark 2 August as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, to upgrade their national Roma integration strategies, and to combat discrimination and promote equality. On 12 February 2019, Parliament called on the EU and the Member States to adopt a stronger, better funded, post-2020 framework, including clear and binding targets and a specific anti-discrimination goal. Parliament also wanted to see more involvement of Roma stakeholders in drawing up and monitoring the policy framework, more attention to specific groups within the Roma population, gender mainstreaming, and a child-centred approach.

On 17 September 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the implementation of Roma integration strategies. Members noted that the overall situation of the Roma people in the EU had not improved, often owing to persistent anti-Gypsyism and a lack of political will. They deplored the fact that a significant number of Roma in Europe live in extremely precarious conditions, which have worsened with the pandemic. Parliament called on the Commission to develop a ‘Roma mainstreaming policy’, and Member States to formally recognise anti-Gypsyism as a particular form of racism against Roma people. Parliament expressed particular concern about the high level of segregation faced by Roma children in schools.

On 21 January 2021, Parliament adopted a resolution on access to access to decent and affordable housing for all, to encourage Member States to increase public investment to eradicate homelessness and house deprivation by 2030. Members explicitly called on Member States to ‘fight
against ... anti-Gypsyism’. They also noted 'with deep concern that the conditions of Roma people continue to be extremely worrying, with many often living in segregated settlements characterised by substandard living conditions and call on the Member States to promote spatial desegregation', urging the Commission and the Member States to 'utilise the planned Just Transition Fund'.

On 20 May 2021, during a debate in the plenary on the inclusion of Roma people in the EU, some Members expressed their disappointment regarding the EU's lack of commitment to ending discrimination and called on Member States to legislate to improve Roma people's lives.

Most recently, in November 2021, a delegation of members of the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) visited Roma villages in Slovakia and published an infoclip to illustrate Roma people's severe housing deprivation.

MAIN REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 The FRA has published a series of studies and surveys on the Roma. In 2008, it surveyed Roma in seven EU Member States in the context of the first EU minorities and discrimination survey (EU-MIDIS I). In 2011, the FRA conducted a second survey on Roma in 11 EU Member States (EU-MIDIS II). In 2016, the FRA surveyed Roma for a third time as part of EU-MIDIS II, to assess progress over time. In 2019, the FRA surveyed Roma and Travellers in six Member States.
2 In December 2021, the European Commission announced that only nine Member States had submitted their new Roma strategic frameworks, while three countries had ongoing Roma strategies (Finland, Portugal and Sweden). The rest of the EU Member States, except Malta, are expected to submit their new Roma policies shortly.

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