



Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020

European
Implementation
Assessment

STUDY

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Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020

European Implementation Assessment

This study provides a review of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies (NRIS) up to 2020. It was produced at the request of the European Parliament's Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) to feed into the discussions regarding the post-2020 framework.

The study provides a synthesis of evaluations and opinions of the EU Framework for NRIS, focusing both on the architecture of this instrument and on the national policy measures that have been put in place in the main policy areas under the framework. It furthermore provides an appreciation of the coordination, consultation and monitoring structures under the framework and the way they work in practice. It also looks at the framework's interplay with other EU legal, funding and policy instruments. It then reviews the main policy objectives and the effect the framework has had on anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism.

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Conclusions

This study provides a synthesis of evaluations and opinions of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies (NRIS) up to 2020. It describes the framework as such, as well as the main policy areas that it targets, namely (Roma access to) education, employment, health, housing, as well as anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism.

The EU Framework for NRIS is an evolving instrument. Considered by many an achievement in itself, its establishment was a turning point for Roma communities in Europe. It put the social integration of people with a Romani background high on the European policy agenda and put pressure on Member States to develop relevant national strategies.

Nonetheless, the framework is often criticised for its non-binding character. As a soft policy tool, it provides a reference point for policy coordination, consultation and monitoring, and targeted policy recommendations for national Roma integration strategies. It is then up to national, regional and local governments to decide if and how they translate the recommendations into administrative capacities and specific policy actions.

National Roma integration strategies (NRIS) are often associated with the creation of documents and structures at EU level, rather than with the development of new policies, the implementation of actions and the monitoring of their results, as these depend on the political priorities of the respective national line ministries rather than on Roma-specific strategies.¹

Despite diverse public administration models and degrees of decentralisation, the actual implementation of both the NRIS and the national Roma integration policies is often more strongly dependent on the political will and priorities of local government leadership than on those of the national leadership.

The NRIS are usually not part of the agendas of the EU Member States' national parliaments, a consequence being that executives are not sufficiently accountable to these parliaments as regards the NRIS and report on them directly to the European Commission.

'Explicit but not exclusive targeting' of the Roma is considered essential for inclusion policy initiatives addressed at them². This implies focusing on the Roma as a target group, but not on the exclusion of other people who share similar socio-economic circumstances with them. This approach does not separate Roma-focused interventions from broader policy initiatives. However, it also engenders the risk that Member States in which a genuine political will is absent and results are not sufficiently monitored would implement actions that have no actual impact on the Roma communities, yet justify the use of funding under the NRIS commitments.

Furthermore, Member States with big Roma populations largely rely on EU funding to implement their NRIS, yet do not publicly declare what portion of their national budgets is allocated for NRIS implementation. In this context, it is difficult to monitor the extent of their commitment.

A key role at the national level is assigned to the national Roma contact points (NRCs) that are appointed by the national governments; some are of Romani background, but the majority are not. Their resources, roles and responsibilities vary significantly, as some of them are assigned to interior ministries and others to ministries managing EU funding. Some are well staffed and are given coordinating functions, while others are not. NRCs rarely have a say as regards the content of Roma

¹ [Roma civil monitor pilot project. A synthesis report on implementation of national Roma integration strategies in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia](#), European Commission, March 2018, p. 7.

² See for example 'Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2015', European Commission, June 2015

integration policies or measures to promote the implementation of the NRIS. Their role is mostly one of communication and reporting to the Commission, something that further shifts the debate to Brussels rather than to the respective capitals.

In the context of the above criticism, the NRIS risk becoming a parallel reality in which national accountability is replaced by a rather loose reporting obligation to the Commission; this could create greater complacency among national politicians when it comes to NRIS implementation.

It would be good to foster national debates on the implementation of the NRIS, also because in order to be effective, Roma policy measures often require complex approaches and close coordination.

That said, it should be noted that there has been some progress in the policy areas covered by the EU framework for NRIS. For instance, early school-leaving has been reduced by 19%, participation in early childhood education has increased by 6% and the experience of hunger has decreased by 11% from 2011 to 2016. Also, the experience of discrimination has decreased and acceptance of the Roma by the general public has increased. Nonetheless, there is a feeling of disappointment among the Roma in local settlements, who feel there has been little or no improvement in their socio-economic situation over the past decade.

In the way it correlates with other policy, legal and funding instruments, the EU framework can be considered an addition. Whereas the country-specific recommendations (CSRs) under the European Semester aim at providing mainstream policy guidance, the Race Equality Directive provides a legal tool with sanctioning possibility and the European structural and investment funds (ESIF) provide funding. The EU framework, on the other hand, provides targeted guidance for Roma integration.

To see the detailed conclusions that have been drawn about the different policy areas under the EU framework, please refer to the final paragraphs under the respective sections.

Acronyms and abbreviations

CSO	civil society organisation
CSR	country-specific recommendation
ECEC	early childhood education and care
EIA	European implementation assessment
EMPL	European Parliament's Committee for Employment and Social Affairs
EP	European Parliament
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
FRA	EU Fundamental Rights Agency
LIBE	European Parliament's Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
MFF	multiannual financial framework
NEET	not in employment, education or training
NRCP	national Roma contact point
NRIS	national Roma integration strategy

Table of contents

1. Research, scope and methodology	1
2. An EU framework for national Roma integration strategies	3
2.1. Background, design and objectives	3
2.2. General considerations concerning the framework	4
2.3. Coordination, consultation and monitoring structures	6
2.3.1. Coordination at EU level	6
2.3.2. Coordination at national level	6
2.3.3. Stakeholder consultations	7
2.3.4. Conclusions	7
2.4. Mobilising EU legal, policy and funding instruments	8
2.4.1. Legal instruments	8
2.4.2. Policy guidance	9
2.4.3. Financial support	9
2.4.4. Conclusions	10
3. Policy areas under the framework	12
3.1. Education	12
3.1.1. Background	12
3.1.2. Measures	13
3.1.3. Results	13
3.1.4. Recommendations	15
3.2. Employment	16
3.2.1. Background	16
3.2.2. Measures	17

3.2.3. Results	17
3.2.4. Recommendations	18
3.3. Health	19
3.3.1. Background	19
3.3.2. Measures	20
3.3.3. Results	21
3.3.4. Recommendations	22
3.4. Housing	22
3.4.1. Background	22
3.4.2. Measures	23
3.4.3. Results	24
3.4.4. Recommendations	25
3.5. Anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism	26
3.5.1. Background	26
3.5.2. Measures	27
3.5.3. Results	28
3.5.4. Recommendations	29

1. Research, scope and methodology

This study looks at the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) over the period up to 2020.³ It was produced at the request of the European Parliament's Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).

The EU Framework for NRIS (the EU framework) was adopted in 2011 and its main objectives were to contribute to the reduction of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination of the Roma by promoting their equal access to education, employment, health and housing both in the EU and in enlargement countries.⁴

This study focuses both on the architecture of the EU framework as such and on the policy measures that were put in place to achieve the said objectives. It describes the coordination, consultation and monitoring structures under the EU framework and the way they work in practice. It also looks at the way the EU framework interacts with other EU legal, funding and policy instruments. It then reviews the main policy objectives and the effect the EU framework has had on anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism.

Not all Member States have an NRIS. While, for instance, Malta does not have one at all, other Member States have adopted 'integrated sets of measures within their broader inclusion policies' in the place of an NRIS. The Member States were given this option by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) in its 2011 conclusions endorsing the EU framework.

The extent to which one can accurately assess the effects of national strategies is limited, given that each of these strategies combines different measures under different sectoral policy areas targeting the Roma. Furthermore, governments do not generally collect official statistics on the Roma. A number of Member States oppose the collection of ethnically disaggregated data for ethical, political or legal reasons. The lack of such data makes it difficult to establish a clear baseline situation of the levels of social exclusion or discrimination, the number of Roma benefiting from inclusion measures, the funds allocated for Roma inclusion measures, or the effects of such measures.

Another limiting circumstance is that financial data are often unavailable, unverifiable or incomparable. This is partly due to the lack of ethnically disaggregated data, but also to the fact that Roma inclusion policies are often part of mainstream measures that do not single the Roma out as a specific target group.

This study is based on desk research, relying primarily on institutional sources, such as the European Commission (Directorate General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) and the Joint Research Centre), the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and relevant publications from think tanks, civil society organisations and Roma interest groups.

Publications based on primary data collection that were also used in this briefing include the Commission's Report on the implementation of national Roma strategies⁵ and its Mid-term

³ [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#)

⁴ The Roma consist of various groups that are labelled with different ethnonyms, such as Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Manouches, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal Arlije, Calé, Gurbet, Kale, Kalderaš, Lovara, Manuš, Sepečides, Ursari or travellers. Some of these ethnonyms are self-designated while others are externally designated. Many groups also use the self-designation Roma. Throughout this paper, the term 'Roma' is used in line with the terminology of European institutions and international organisations, to refer to all these different groups, without denying the unique features and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups.

⁵ [Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies](#), European Commission, 2019.

evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020,⁶ as well as publications by the FRA, inter alia its Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey on Roma (EU-MIDIS II)⁷ and the ECA's Special report on EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration.⁸

⁶ [Mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020](#), European Commission, 1 November 2019.

⁷ [Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma, Selected findings](#), EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 2018.

⁸ [Special report no 14/2016: EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration](#), European Court of Auditors, June 2016.

2. An EU framework for national Roma integration strategies

Since its establishment, the EU framework has been the subject of many evaluations and critical analyses. This section first describes the context in which the framework came into being, its main design and policy features and how it evolved over time. It then provides an overview of both the results and challenges that have been abstracted from different available evaluations and about which there seems to be consensus.

2.1. Background, design and objectives

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. Out of an estimated total of 10-12 million in Europe, some 6 million live in the EU, and most of them are citizens of an EU country.⁹ The estimated share of the Roma in EU countries in 2012 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 countries.

A significant part of the Roma in Europe live in very poor socio-economic conditions, whether in rural or urban areas. The discrimination, social exclusion and segregation they face are mutually reinforcing. Their limited access to high-quality education and difficulty of integrating into the labour market translate into low income levels and poor health, which in turn result in higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy, compared with non-Roma populations.¹⁰

In 2016, some 80 % of the Roma lived below their country's poverty threshold; every third Roma lived in housing without tap water; every third Roma child lived in a household where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month; and 50 % of the Roma aged 6-24 did not attend school. Against this background, one can only conclude that the Roma face discrimination and unequal access to public services.¹¹

The EU has long stressed the need for better Roma integration. Already in the second half of the 1990s, the Commission called for national measures in accession countries with large Roma populations to further the social integration of the Roma and, later, to transpose and put into effect the Race Equality Directive.¹²

In 2011, the Commission called for the adoption of national Roma integration strategies (NRIS). To ensure that effective policies are in place in the Member States, the Commission proposed that NRIS were designed, or, where they already existed, were adapted to meet EU Roma integration goals, through targeted actions and adequate funding (national, EU and other) to deliver them. It proposed solutions to address the existing barriers to a more effective use of EU funds and laid the foundations of a monitoring mechanism.

The EU framework for NRIS encouraged Member States and enlargement countries to adopt a comprehensive approach to Roma integration and socio-economic inclusion, to mainstream Roma inclusion, using policy, legal and funding instruments, to adopt NRIS and to set up coordination, consultation, and monitoring mechanisms.

⁹ European Commission website: [Who are the Roma?](#).

¹⁰ [Roma Education in Europe, Practices, policies and politics](#), Maja Miskovic (editor), 2013.

¹¹ [Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016.

¹² [Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin](#)

The overall objective of the EU framework is to promote the equal treatment of the Roma and their social and economic integration in EU societies. It also establishes specific integration goals for the Roma, linked to their access to education, employment, healthcare and housing, which Member States were invited to endorse. More specifically, Member States were called upon to:

- ensure that all Roma children complete primary school;
- close the gaps between the Roma and the non-Roma in respect to employment, health, housing and public utilities (water, electricity).

At the EU level, the Commission set up coordination and consultation structures and mechanisms, mobilised funding, and undertook activities to monitor the implementation of the objectives of the EU framework. The Commission enhanced its dialogue with the Member States on Roma integration, in particular by establishing the network of National Contact Points for Roma integration (NRCs) in October 2012, to discuss solutions to the challenges at hand.

In 2013, the EU framework was strengthened by a Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures.¹³ This 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, contributing to the development of an EU system of monitoring. The December 2016 Council conclusions on accelerating the process of Roma integration confirmed the Member States' commitment.

2.2. General considerations concerning the framework

Most stakeholders consider the very existence of the EU framework for NRIS an achievement.¹⁴ There seems to be broad consensus that the framework has helped place Roma inclusion higher on the European and national political agendas and created a political commitment to specific, large-scale, long-term integrated action.

The EU framework has triggered the development, implementation and monitoring of national strategies and integration measures. A main weakness however, is its non-binding character, resulting from a treaty-based distribution of competences. The framework is a soft policy tool that relies on political will at all levels of government in Member States for putting national strategies into effect, including the administrative capacities and budgets.

The structures that the EU framework put in place represent a system of permanent cooperation that has the potential to lead to better alignment of initiatives, increased knowledge-sharing and concentration of economic resources.

Annual monitoring and reporting from the Commission, targeted policy guidance for Member States, data collection and, since 2016, a reporting obligation for Member States are all considered crucial for keeping the social integration of Roma on the policy agenda and for improving knowledge and evidence-based policy-making.

The EU framework gives Member States the flexibility to adapt its objectives to their specific national contexts. While this has allowed Member States to apply a tailored approach, some suggest that it has also led to fragmented implementation, reduced effectiveness and limited progress towards EU Roma integration goals.

¹³ [Council Recommendation of 9 December 2013 on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States](#)

¹⁴ [Revisiting the EU Roma Framework: Assessing the European Dimension for the Post-2020 Future](#), Open Society Institute, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, March 2017.

A point of criticism is the use of the term 'Roma' as a common denominator. While the framework highlighted the importance of diversity by using this broad umbrella term, it failed to recognise the diversity within the population of people with a Romani background.

Some stakeholders say that the framework should have explicitly mentioned thematic areas, such as Roma political participation, Roma arts and culture, and Roma history, as complementary measures to the four main priority areas of education, employment, housing and healthcare.¹⁵

As regards the scope of the EU framework and the NRIS, some criticise the fact that the focus is extensively on marginalised Roma and recommend increasing investment in, and empowerment of, Roma youth, women and children, and paying more attention to the intra-EU mobility of the Roma.

The initial absence of a response to anti-gypsyism in the EU framework resulted in the Member States' reluctance to include explicit measures targeting anti-discrimination and specifically anti-gypsyism in their national strategies, and has been criticised. Following the adoption of the EU framework, the Commission has taken a series of measures to fight Roma discrimination. It has reinforced its monitoring of how Member States implement the anti-discrimination and anti-racism and xenophobia legislation.

The original goals of the EU framework were not SMART, meaning they were neither specific nor time bound and therefore not measurable; furthermore, some were rather unambitious, others were not realistic.

In a special report, the ECA identified a number of remaining shortcomings as regards the NRIS.¹⁶ For instance, it found that monitoring the progress made by Roma integration projects has been difficult, mainly because of shortcomings in relation to the availability and quality of data on Roma participants. The lack of comprehensive and robust data is a problem not only in relation to projects, but also to policy-making at EU and national level. The ECA special report also found that:

- the national strategies do not indicate what level of funding is needed to carry out the proposed measures for Roma inclusion. Furthermore, they do not indicate what funds have been made available for such measures from the national budget and, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), from the EU budget;
- anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism were not given enough attention in the early years of the existence of the framework;
- the selected Member States have not always taken into account the need to actively involve civil society organisations, in particular those representing the Roma community itself, when drafting their NRIS;
- the role of the NRCPs set up to coordinate the development and implementation of the NRIS has sometimes been undermined by a mismatch of resources and responsibilities.

¹⁵ Ibid., Revisiting the EU Roma Framework, Open Society Institute, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, p. 5.

¹⁶ [Special report no 14/2016: EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration](#), European Court of Auditors, June 2016.

2.3. Coordination, consultation and monitoring structures

This section looks at coordination at EU and national level, and at cooperation and consultation with the stakeholders. It provides an overview of the different structures that are in place, looks at the extent to which they are considered effective, and makes recommendations for improvement.

2.3.1. Coordination at EU level

Several coordination mechanisms supporting the EU framework have been set up at EU level,¹⁷ namely:

- the Commission's **Roma Team** in DG JUST's Non-Discrimination and Roma Coordination Unit coordinates the implementation of the EU framework;
- the **Roma Task Force**, created in 2010, is made up of different Commission DGs, including JUST, Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL), Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC), Health and Food Safety (SANTE), Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), Migration and Home Affairs (HOME), Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO) and Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI). The FRA is also part of it;
- the **Network of NRCPs**, created in 2012, is a mechanism for coordination both among the Member States' contact points, and among them and the Commission. It meets twice a year;
- the **European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds** (EU Roma Network) is a 'learning network' focused on the use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to facilitate Roma inclusion. It is made up of the NRCPs and ESIF management authorities.
- the **European Platform for Roma Inclusion**, which brings together representatives of the national and local governments, the EU, international organisations and civil society on an annual basis. It aims to encourage cooperation and the exchange of successful Roma inclusion practices;
- the EU Roma summit;
- the Member States' **annual report to the Commission on the implementation of their NRIS**;
- **consultation meetings** with civil society and international organisations: the Commission regularly organises meetings bringing together civil society, international institutions and organisations (Council of Europe, UN agencies, the OSCE), EU level and umbrella organisations. The local governments network Eurocities is part of it.

2.3.2. Coordination at national level

At the national level, the following structures have been put in place:

- the **national Roma contact points**, the main coordinators with regard to the development and implementation of the NRIS;
- the **national Roma platforms** established in most Member States (and all enlargement countries), whose aim it is to ensure inclusive involvement of and coordination with all relevant stakeholders (such as civil society, public authorities,

¹⁷ [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies](#), European Commission, August 2017.

and Roma and non-Roma communities). Regrettably, the business sector is hardly present in such platforms.

2.3.3. Stakeholder consultations

At the EU level, consultations are held with stakeholders such as the Council of Europe, the Economic and Social Committee, EU agencies such as the FRA, UN agencies, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EEA and Norway Grants, the World Bank, civil society associations and foundations, representatives of municipalities, thematic umbrella organisations and others.¹⁸

The EU framework gave an impetus to national-level consultations with stakeholders (Roma community representatives and civil society). New mechanisms include:

- national Roma platforms;
- annual national progress reports that are shared with stakeholders;
- dedicated advisory committees;
- projects to further strengthen cooperation with Roma NGOs;
- regular consultation meetings with Roma representatives and other stakeholders (eg. municipalities);
- expert groups including both government and NGO representatives.

2.3.4. Conclusions

The development of European and national coordination structures that have fostered the creation of platforms for Roma participation and cooperation among stakeholders is an effect attributed to the EU framework for NRIS.

The designation of NRCs to coordinate NRIS development, cross-sectoral implementation and monitoring, and their increasing involvement in planning the use of the ESIF and mainstream policies, are considered positive.

The creation of the European Platform for Roma inclusion in 2009 and the national platforms for Roma inclusion in 2015, and the role of equality bodies in the fight against discrimination, are other strong points mentioned in evaluations.

Member States have developed national consultation processes, convened and managed by the NRCs. However, important obstacles persist, such as lack of capacity and sustainable funding, not sufficiently transparent or inclusive involvement of civil society, and limited administrative capacity of local governments to implement sustainable integrated measures.

Many of the NRCs interviewed during the Commission's mid-term evaluation said they have sufficient administrative capacity to effectively coordinate NRIS implementation. Nonetheless, the Commission evaluation report concludes that the NRCs' mandate and powers are sometimes weak and that they have limited influence on the design and implementation of mainstream policies and, more generally, on policies implemented by other institutions at the national and local level. The report concludes that coordination is not yet well integrated into the national policy cycles of planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The Commission report further concludes that the NRCs have become increasingly involved in matters involving coordination and have been contributing to policy-making and the use of

¹⁸ [Commission Staff Working Document, Evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#), 4 December 2018.

national and EU funds¹⁹. However, in its more recent implementation report on the NRIS, it concludes that 'NRISs are not well known, even in some cases by key administrative departments in the government. NRCs have limited power to influence decision-making processes across policies, which is a major obstacle before their coordination capacity with regard to the NRIS'²⁰.

In its Synthesis report on implementation of national Roma integration strategies, the Roma civil monitor project concluded that implementation of measures in different policy fields depends on the political priorities of the respective line ministries rather than on strategic planning and coordination at the level of the government (across ministries). The content of the Roma integration policies and the tools for reinforcing the implementation of the measures planned in the NRIS are seldom in the hands of the NRCs, which mostly play a role in communication and reporting to the Commission. The actual position and influence of the NRCs differ across countries; for instance, some NRCs are dissociated from the government agency that acts as the main driving force, coordinator or expert body for Roma integration or social inclusion. In some cases, insufficient coordination seems to stem from a lack of commitment by ministries, from the political context or from the lack of participation at local and regional level.

The NRC network is considered a good opportunity for NRCs to establish contact with colleagues in other Member States dealing with similar situations and to exchange practices.

The Roma Task Force is considered to play an important role in the mainstreaming of Roma inclusion into different policy fields.

There is room for improvement with regard to the coordination between the national Roma platforms and the European Roma platform.

Despite efforts, weaknesses have been identified with regard to the involvement of civil society in the practical implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NRIS.

2.4. Mobilising EU legal, policy and funding instruments

Since the launch of the EU framework, legal, policy and financial support instruments have been mobilised and aligned to promote Roma inclusion. This section looks at the way the different policy options are being coordinated.

2.4.1. Legal instruments

Member States' efforts to fulfil their commitments with regard to the EU framework should not be based solely on the socio-economic inclusion approach; they should also target compliance with human rights standards. Mainstream EU legislation prohibits discrimination, hate speech and hate crime targeting the Roma. The best-known pieces of legislation in this field – Directive 2000/43/EC (the **Race Equality Directive**),²¹ and Directive 2008/913/JHA (the **Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia**)²² – were already in existence at the time when the EU framework was adopted.

¹⁹ Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies, European Commission, August 2017, p. 13

²⁰ Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, European Commission, December 2018, p.28

²¹ Council Directive [2000/43/EC](#) of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

²² Ibid., Revisiting the EU Roma Framework, Open Society Institute, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, p. 12.

The Race Equality Directive prohibits discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origin and covers:

- employment and occupation;
- vocational training;
- membership of employer and employee organisations;
- social protection, including social security and health care;
- education;
- access to goods and services which are available to the public, including housing.

Under this directive, all Member States must establish a specialised body for the promotion of equal treatment on grounds of race and ethnic origin. The legislation sets out minimum requirements.

The purpose of the **Framework Decision on combatting racism and xenophobia**²³ is to ensure that certain serious manifestations of racism and xenophobia are punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties throughout the EU. Furthermore, it aims to improve and encourage judicial cooperation in this field. Roma and pro-Roma NGOs are involved in the process of monitoring online hate speech.

Since 2016, the Commission has been authorised to launch infringement proceedings against Member States that breach this framework; this is considered a potential tool to combat discrimination against Roma. Nonetheless, civil society organisations are not well aware of this tool and it needs to be promoted among Roma activists, who could bring the necessary evidence to the Commission whenever violations of this section of the EU Roma Framework legislation occur.

2.4.2. Policy guidance

The **European Semester** provides a framework for the coordination of economic policies across the European Union. It allows EU countries to discuss their economic and budget plans and to monitor progress at specific times throughout the year.

Through the European Semester exercise, the Commission steers and monitors Member States' actions aimed at mainstreaming Roma inclusion policies. Since 2012, the five Member States with the largest Roma communities and most acute challenges²⁴ have received country-specific recommendations (CSRs) on Roma inclusion. These have increasingly focused on education, calling for systemic measures to promote Roma children's participation in quality inclusive mainstream education. The CSRs steered the funding priorities in the 2014-2020 programming period.²⁵

2.4.3. Financial support

The bulk of EU **financial support** for social inclusion measures in general, including measures promoting Roma inclusion, is provided through the ERDF and the ESF.

The ECA, in its special report on EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration, concluded that the Commission has made significant progress in setting out EU policy initiatives promoting Roma integration, and that most Member States had developed an NRIS by 2012, but that this had come too late to have an impact on the design of ERDF and ESF operational programmes (OPs) and the selection of projects during the 2007-2013 programme period.

²³ Council Framework Decision [2008/913/JHA](#) of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

²⁴ Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

²⁵ [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies](#), August 2017, p. 4.

In relation to the 2014-2020 period, the ECA noted a number of improvements. For example, Roma integration was explicitly referred to in the ESIF Regulation; furthermore, specific funding priority was introduced in the ESIF in this regard. Moreover, Member States with country-specific recommendations related to Roma integration became obliged to devote funds its promotion. The ECA considers, however, that additional efforts are required at both Commission and Member State level to make sure that these changes will result in projects that better contribute to Roma integration on the ground.

The amount of funding channelled specifically to Roma integration initiatives is not recorded. However, Member States' planning documents suggest that around €1.5 billion has been earmarked for the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as the Roma, during the 2014-2020 programme period.²⁶

Most of the national public funding is allocated for investment in education and housing and infrastructure, whereas the lion share of EU funding is spent on employment measures. Much less funding goes for health or for horizontal and structural measures. According to the ECA, measures to address anti-gypsyism received less attention, a criticism that was strongly supported by Roma civil society and later on taken over in the Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in 2013.

Furthermore, Roma civil society organisations stress that financial investment seldom reaches its beneficiaries: a significant percentage of expenditure covers salaries and staff and considerable sums are consumed by mediating institutions.²⁷

2.4.4. Conclusions

In the way it correlates to other policy, legal and funding instruments, the EU Framework for NRIS can be considered an addition. Whereas the CSRs under the European Semester aim at providing mainstream policy guidance, the EU framework can provide targeted guidance for Roma integration measures.

'Explicit but not exclusive targeting' of the Roma is considered an essential principle with regard to policy initiatives on inclusion.²⁸ It implies focusing on the Roma as a target group, without excluding others in similar socio-economic circumstances from the focus of these policy initiatives. This approach does not separate Roma-focused interventions from broader policy initiatives. However, it also bears the risk that Member States in which a genuine political will is absent and where results are not sufficiently monitored, would implement actions that have no impact on the Roma communities, yet justify the use of funding under the NRIS commitments. At the same time, Member States strongly rely on EU funding in the implementation of their NRIS, but do not publicly declare what amounts from their national budgets are available to this end. In this context, it is difficult to monitor national investment.

There are calls to target the Roma more explicitly under EU and national programmes, such as the Youth Guarantee and Erasmus+. Many point to possible further improvements in the use of the ESIF and call for NGOs and local governments to be given direct access to funds.

At the financial level, EU added value has been created through the establishment of a close link between the European Semester, the ESIF in their 2014-2020 programming period, and the NRIS. In

²⁶ [Special report no 14/2016: EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration](#), European Court of Auditors, June 2016.

²⁷ Ibid., Revisiting the EU Roma Framework, Open Society Institute, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, p. 17.

²⁸ [How to mainstream Roma inclusion in general programmes, projects and interventions](#), ESF Learning Network.

many countries, much of the funding for Roma integration comes from ESIF/Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)) funding, while there seems to be more reluctance to invest domestic money for this purpose, at least beyond the national co-funding required under the ESIF. However, this is difficult to assess due to the limitations pointed out above. In many cases, the ESIF have helped scale up existing projects, intensify actions and improve the quality of interventions.²⁹

The ESIF remain the most important source of funding for local interventions in Roma integration in the countries with the largest Roma populations. Effective use of the ESIF requires skills that many local governments do not necessarily possess. Moreover, the ESIF are planned in a top-down manner and often do not meet local needs.

The Commission has launched infringement procedures against Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia over the discrimination against Roma children in education. While these procedures have been generally welcomed as a positive development, CSOs have reported that nevertheless, unlawful practices of discrimination against Roma children in education continue.

The CSRs under the European Semester give Member States general policy guidelines to help them identify funding priorities with regard to Roma integration in general, but also with regard to Roma education, improved living standards and employment. The introduction of ex ante conditionalities has been the main innovation. It requires Member States to have a policy framework in place to become eligible to use the ESIF for Roma inclusion measures under the dedicated investment priority.

As regards the planning and implementation of the ESIF, it is suggested that the degree and quality of stakeholder participation varies across countries, and in many cases the mechanisms and processes for such participation are weak or limited to specific phases of the policy cycle.

The European Semester is non-binding, but there is a common acceptance of the need to work towards common, quantified EU targets. This approach may also be appropriate for the post-2020 EU Framework for NRIS.

²⁹ [Evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, European Commission Staff Working Document](#), December 2018, p. 51.

3. Policy areas under the framework

This section looks at the five policy areas under the framework, namely education, employment, health, housing and anti-discrimination, and anti-gypsyism. It describes the background and objectives in each policy area, the measures taken, results achieved and priorities to be addressed.

3.1. Education

3.1.1. Background

The EU Framework for NRIS recognises access to education as a key priority. It recommends that Member States take effective measures to ensure equal treatment and full access to quality and mainstream education for Roma boys and girls, and to ensure that all Roma pupils complete at least compulsory education.

The EU framework also called on Member States to improve access to education through the following specific measures:

- widen Roma children's access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC);
- support Roma pupils' primary school completion;
- prevent discrimination and/or segregation of Roma children;
- reduce Roma pupils' dropout rates;
- encourage young Roma to participate in secondary and tertiary education; and
- improve the intercultural competences of teachers.

The subsequent Council recommendation of 9 December 2013 on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States called for:

- eliminating any school segregation;
- putting an end to any inappropriate placement of Roma pupils in special needs schools;
- reducing early school leaving throughout all levels of education, including at secondary level and vocational training;
- increasing the access to, and quality of, early childhood education and care, including targeted support, as necessary;
- considering the needs of individual pupils and addressing those accordingly, in close cooperation with their families;
- using inclusive and tailor-made teaching and learning methods, including learning support for struggling learners and measures to fight illiteracy, and promoting the availability and use of extracurricular activities;
- encouraging greater parental involvement and improving teacher training, where relevant;
- encouraging Roma participation in and completion of secondary and tertiary education;
- widening access to second-chance education and adult learning, and providing support for the transition between educational levels and support for the acquisition of skills that are adapted to the needs of the labour market.

3.1.2. Measures

The following information was collected by the Commission from the NRCs, who were asked about measures implemented under their countries' NRIS:³⁰

Most Member States invest in measures to reduce early school-leaving.

The next most frequently used measures include:

- considering the needs of individual pupils in cooperation with their families;
- increasing access to, and quality of, early childhood education and care;
- encouraging Roma participation in – and completion of – secondary and tertiary education.

Efforts are also made to:

- fight school segregation;
- use inclusive teaching methods;
- develop skills adapted to labour market needs.

The NRCs consider the following thematic areas important, ranking them in terms of their relevance as follows:³¹

- fight early school-leaving;
- consider the needs of individual pupils;
- encourage Roma participation in – and completion of – secondary and tertiary education;
- increase access to and quality of early childhood education and care;
- eliminate school segregation;
- use inclusive chance education and adult learning;
- fight illiteracy;
- prevent and tailor-made teaching and learning methods;
- support the acquisition of skills adapted to labour market needs;
- support transition between educational levels;
- encourage parental involvement;
- improve teacher training;
- promote extracurricular activities;
- widen access to second-inappropriate placement of Roma in special needs schools.

3.1.3. Results

Data collected by the FRA³² show that, while in some Member States Roma children's participation in education has improved over time, the gap in educational achievement between Roma and non-Roma children remains high, especially beyond compulsory education.

The data show that Roma pupils are leaving school early and access universities and other tertiary education establishments and training institutions at very low rates.

³⁰ [Report on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 7,

³¹ NRCs' reporting on Roma integration measures implemented in 2017.

³² [A persisting concern: anti-gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018.

Between 2011 and 2016, participation in early childhood education increased,³³ but still lagged behind the general population average. While Roma children's participation in compulsory education improved, it remained below the general population average in most countries, as mentioned above. The Europe 2020 early school leavers target is 10 %. The number of Roma pupils who left education between 2011 and 2016 at the level of secondary school on average decreased from 87 % in 2011 to 68 % in 2016. The proportion of Roma early school leavers compared to early school leavers in the general population across all countries surveyed remained very high.³⁴ In respect of school segregation, the share of Roma attending classes where 'all classmates are Roma' on average increased from 10 % in 2011 to 15 % in 2016.

In 2019, 68 % of Roma children left education early. In addition, only 18 % of Roma children transitioned to higher levels of education and the absenteeism and early-school-leaving rates among the Roma were significantly higher than for other categories of pupils.³⁵

Roma enrolment rates in compulsory education in most Member States, for which data are available, have reached similar levels as for the rest of the population.³⁶ With respect to early leavers from secondary or vocational training education, the gap between Roma and non-Roma has shrunk from 74 % to 57 %, but with an average 68 % drop-out rate among the Roma, much progress is still needed.

The most widespread achievement mentioned by the NRCs in the area of education is mediation.

Other achievements include:

- development of kindergarten capacities;
- improved support to fighting and monitoring early school-leaving;
- incorporating Roma inclusion and non-discrimination-related topics in teacher training or national curricula.

The most significant challenges highlighted by the NRCs include:

- school participation, absenteeism and early school-leaving;
- the transition from primary to secondary education and the completion of secondary education.

Other challenges include:

- fighting segregation;
- ensuring and developing human capacities;
- cooperation among stakeholders;
- promoting early childhood education;
- care;
- adult learning and second-chance education;
- data availability.

³³ In six out of the nine countries surveyed by the FRA. In Romania and Portugal, by contrast, it went down.

³⁴ [A persisting concern: anti-gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, p. 28.

³⁵ [Report on National Roma Integration Strategies: Key Conclusions](#), European Commission, September 2019.

³⁶ Significant gaps remain in Greece and Romania.

3.1.4. Recommendations

Some of the important policy lessons³⁷ in this area include:

- early intervention and prevention are important;
- the participation and empowerment of Roma parents (as a key element of supporting children in each stage of education) need to be ensured;
- extracurricular activities play a role in strengthening Roma children's identity and social networks;
- continuous complex support measures (tutoring combined with scholarship and removal of other cost barriers) need to be applied with a view to promoting the transition between educational levels and to employment;
- although affirmative action has helped to improve Roma participation in education, it is important to avoid dedicating specific slots for Roma who would have qualified for regular admittance.

In its communication to the Parliament and the Council³⁸, the Commission concludes that especially in Member States with a high share of Roma pupils, a systematic, complex and long-term approach is needed to fight school and class segregation, which remains a pressing problem undermining the success of other inclusion measures.

Key elements of this approach include:

- providing early and free access to quality inclusive early-childhood education and care in integrated settings (both to prepare Roma children, to overcome prejudice between Roma and non-Roma children and parents in order to prevent later segregation);
- supporting Roma parents in choosing a school for their children;
- gradual closing of segregated schools by the educational authorities;
- distributing Roma children across several schools (through the reorganisation of school catchment areas).

These active desegregation measures should be accompanied by additional financial and professional support to promote the social and academic integration of Roma children in mainstream schools, such as:

- covering transportation costs;
- school materials;
- meals, extracurricular activities;
- supplementary classes;
- training pre-school staff and teachers in new teaching methods in integrated school settings (including overcoming stereotypes);
- facilitating communication between parents and schools;
- informing parents of the benefits of integrated education;
- student mentoring;
- after-school support for Roma children;
- employment of teacher assistants;

³⁷ The recommendations under Section 3 are not the author's, but were abstracted from the different studies and position papers that were consulted.

³⁸ Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies, European Commission, August 2019, p.3.

- measures to sensitise the general public on the importance of educational inclusion and intercultural education for community relations via campaigns and media channels.

Priorities to be addressed require to:³⁹

- support home parenting and early-childhood learning as part of comprehensive early intervention and prevention programmes;
- introduce or further extend quality, inclusive, free and obligatory pre-school education and remove financial and non-financial barriers to access;
- promote quality, inclusiveness and results in education through incentives (funding and reform of teacher training), attracting the best teachers to disadvantaged schools/regions;
- systematically monitor and fight school and class segregation with long-term comprehensive, preparatory and accompanying measures supporting Roma families;
- ensure public support and cooperation of all stakeholders to complement explicit active desegregation measures;
- combine scholarships, tutoring and extracurricular activities to prevent early-school-leaving and promote the transition to the next stage of education;
- target Roma girls, their parents and teachers to fight gender stereotypes and reduce early school-leaving;
- promote transition to – and completion of – upper secondary and further education including by career guidance for Roma students and their families;

3.2. Employment

3.2.1. Background

The adoption of the EU Framework for NRIS in 2011 took place in a period when the EU had to develop effective measures to respond to Europe's economic crisis. The employment and social dimensions of this crisis were among the essential elements of the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in 2010. In line with the headline target of the Europe 2020 strategy to ensure that 75 % of the EU population aged 20-64 will have been employed by 2020, the EU Framework for NRIS set the goal to ensure better access to employment for Roma people and to narrow the employment gap between the Roma and the rest of the population.

The framework calls on Member States to:

- grant access to vocational training, to the job market and to self-employment tools and initiatives in a non-discriminatory way;
- encourage access to micro-credit;
- give due attention to qualified Roma civil servants in the public sector;
- ensure that public employment services reach out the Roma and provide personalised services and mediation.

The subsequent 2013 Council recommendation called for the following specific measures:

- support for first work experience, vocational training, on-the-job training, lifelong learning and skills development;
- support for self-employment and entrepreneurship;

³⁹ [Report on the National Roma integration strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 9.

- provision of equal access to mainstream public employment services, alongside services to support individual job-seekers, focusing on personalised guidance and individual action planning and, where appropriate, promoting employment opportunities within the civil service;
- elimination of barriers, including discrimination, to (re)entry into the labour market.

3.2.2. Measures

At the time of the adoption of the EU framework, some Member States and enlargement countries were implementing a host of initiatives aimed at increasing Roma labour market participation under various initiatives such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 and social inclusion action plans. To address the Roma, the majority of approaches were focused on promoting Roma employment and Roma entry into the formal labour market, especially in the context of the ESF programmes. However, there is little evidence of measures to tackle anti-gypsyism in the labour market.

The following information was collected by the Commission from the NRCs, who were asked about measures implemented under the NRIS.⁴⁰

The two largest groups of measures implemented by most Member States aim at:

- removing barriers to the labour market;
- Individualised support for job-seekers.

Fewer, but still significant number of countries invest in:

- vocational training,
- lifelong learning and skill development
- self-employment and entrepreneurship.

The NRCs highlight the following actions as important, ranking them in the following order of relevance:

- eliminate labour market barriers, including discrimination;
- provide personalised guidance to individual job-seekers;
- support vocational training;
- support lifelong learning and skills development;
- support self-employment and entrepreneurship;
- support first work experience;
- support on-the-job training;
- provide equal access to mainstream public employment services;
- promote employment opportunities within the civil service.

3.2.3. Results

In 2011, the Roma employment rate was much lower than that for the general population in most EU Member States, especially in respect of women and youth. According to data published in a 2011 FRA survey,⁴¹ the employment gap between the Roma and the general population was 42.6 %. The share of Roma whose self-declared main activity status was 'paid work', including full-time, part-time, ad hoc jobs and self-employment, was 26 %, while the EU-28 average employment rate was 68.6 % (Eurostat).

⁴⁰ [Report on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 10,

⁴¹ [The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2012.

With respect to employment, the gap between Roma and non-Roma was significant, including for the category of youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Roma employment rates were about 40 % in most Member States, while Roma NEET on average increased from 56 % to 63 % between 2011 and 2016.⁴² Data collected by the FRA⁴³ show no change, between 2011 and 2016, in the proportion of Roma who indicated that their main activity was 'paid work'; yet there was an important gender gap.

This difference could partly be attributed to the impact of anti-gypsyism alongside other factors related to persisting social exclusion, such as poor functional literacy, inadequate qualifications or poor social skills, as well as traditional gender roles still common in Roma communities. The rates of experiences involving discrimination due to one's Roma background when looking for work and while at work remain, on average, very high. Many Roma across the EU engage in entrepreneurial activities, but the employment potential of this entrepreneurial activity is not utilised in full.

In their reporting on integration measures implemented in 2017, several NRCPs referred to the positive impact of economic growth on the Roma's prospects for employment.⁴⁴ Even more NRCPs referred to targeted measures, such as:

- regional employment programmes;
- career-counselling;
- vocational or on-the-job training;
- job matching tailored to Roma or vulnerable job-seekers.

The above listed measures are considered more effective when the Roma are involved in the capacity of mediators, social workers, or other service providers.

NRCPs point out three main types of challenges:

- capacity of implementing structures;
- discrimination against the Roma;
- attitudes and trust of the Roma for other Roma.

3.2.4. Recommendations

According to the Commission evaluation, the most critical points in employment appear to be:

- ensuring an effective transition from education to the open labour market;
- tackling discrimination by employers;
- matching labour demand with labour supply (especially among Roma youth not in education, employment or training).
- The growing rates of Roma youth not in education, employment or training would require even more efforts in supporting a first work experience.

Two other areas that should be prioritised are:

- safeguards and personalised services to ensure that mainstream public employment services effectively reach out to disadvantaged Roma job-seekers;
- positive action to promote Roma employment in the civil service.

⁴² [Report on the National Roma integration strategies: key conclusions](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 3.

⁴³ [Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Roma - Selected findings](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, p. 22.

⁴⁴ [Report on the National Roma integration strategies: key conclusions](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 10.

In order to reduce the gender gap in employment and the rate of Roma youth not in education, employment or training, it is considered essential to incentivise and cooperate closely with private employers and to explicitly target Roma youth and women in mainstream policies (rather than creating parallel employment structures). Improving Roma employability should also include development of IT and foreign language skills. To ensure employment, however, other barriers also need to be addressed, in particular:

- discrimination by employers;
- limited social network of Roma job-seekers;
- traditional gender roles in Roma communities.

A combination of training, supported internships and anti-discrimination measures targeting employers can play an important role.

According to the NRCs, priority action should be taken to:⁴⁵

- enable mainstream public employment services to effectively support Roma job-seekers' integration in the primary labour market;
- (continue to) train and employ Roma as youth mentors and mediators to support transitions in education and to the labour market;
- target Roma (youth and women) more explicitly with active labour market policies, including the Youth Guarantee;
- sensitise and incentivise employers to employ Roma;
- systematically monitor and fight discrimination with regard to labour market access and at the workplace;
- combine job placement support (internship) with IT- and language training and work with employers;
- prioritise (re)integration in the primary labour market through parallel systems (e.g. public or informal work);
- work on integrated solutions to tackle the vulnerable situation of undocumented mobile Roma, including by transnational cooperation.

3.3. Health

3.3.1. Background

Better access to healthcare is a right in itself (Article 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights). Improved health among children in general is linked with better educational outcomes and better socio-economic conditions. Better access to healthcare, including health promotion and disease prevention, and also actions resulting in an improved health status among adults in general, is related to the universal health system and positively influences productivity and economic output. Poor housing conditions may affect one's health status, while poor access to housing may limit one's access to healthcare. The low health status of the Roma is mainly due to the social determinants of health that affect the members of all vulnerable groups. Relevant factors include not only access to healthcare, but also access to education and housing. The EU Framework for NRIS mentions that the life expectancy at birth in the EU is 76 years for men and 82 years for women. For the Roma, it is estimated to be 10 years less. In addition, while the infant mortality rate in the EU is 4.3 per one thousand live births, there is evidence that the rate is much higher among Roma communities. This

⁴⁵ [Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies: key conclusions](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 11.

disparity reflects the overall gap in health between Roma and non-Roma. This difference is, inter alia, linked to:

- the poor living conditions of the Roma;
- the lack of a targeted information campaign on a healthy lifestyle;
- limited access to quality healthcare;
- exposure to higher health risks.

In a 2009 FRA survey,⁴⁶ discrimination by healthcare personnel also emerged as a particular problem for the Roma: 17 % indicated they had experienced discrimination in this area in the previous 12 months. Use of prevention services among the Roma population is low and, according to some studies, over 25 % of Roma children are not fully vaccinated.⁴⁷

The EU Framework for NRIS states that Member States should provide access to quality healthcare especially for Roma children and women, as well as access to preventive care and social services for the Roma as a whole at a similar level and under the same conditions as to the rest of the population.⁴⁸ Where possible, qualified Roma should be involved in healthcare programmes targeting their communities.

The 2013 Council recommendation calls for effective measures to ensure equal treatment of the Roma in their access to universally available healthcare services on the basis of general eligibility criteria. This goal was to be attained, among other things, by:

- removing barriers to access to the general healthcare system;
- improving access to medical check-ups, prenatal and postnatal care and family planning, as well as sexual and reproductive healthcare, generally provided by national healthcare services;
- improving access to free vaccination programmes targeting children and vaccination programmes targeting, in particular, groups most at risk and/or those living in marginalised and/or remote areas;
- promoting awareness of health and healthcare issues.

3.3.2. Measures

NRCs reported to the Commission that a number of measures had been implemented in 2017.⁴⁹ The two most significant measures reported by a majority of NRCs involved:

- removing general barriers to healthcare and promoting health awareness;
- representing a balance between supply and demand-side interventions.

Other relevant measures included:

- targeted vaccination programmes;
- access to specialised health services.

⁴⁶ [European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Main Results Report](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009.

⁴⁷ [An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council](#), 2011, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Member States are already required to give the Roma (as any other EU citizens) non-discriminatory access to education, employment, vocational training, healthcare, social protection and housing under Directive 2000/43/EC.

⁴⁹ [Report on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 12.

NRCs highlighted a number of actions as important, ranking them according to their relevance as follows:

- remove barriers to healthcare;
- promote health awareness;
- improve access to free vaccination programmes targeting children and groups most at risk;
- improve access to medical check-ups, prenatal and postnatal care and family planning.

According to the Commission, there was a notable lack of reference to efforts to address discrimination, improve the hygiene at home and enhance access to healthy food.⁵⁰

3.3.3. Results

In its midterm review of the EU Framework for NRIS, the Commission concludes that in general, the self-perceived health status of the Roma has improved,⁵¹ which points to some success resulting from other health measures, such as those promoting health awareness, access to vaccination, medical check-ups, pre- and post-natal care and family planning. Improved perceptions of health could also be linked to the declining rate of Roma suffering from hunger on a regular basis in most countries.

Nonetheless, differences in the share of Roma covered by national health insurance between 2011 and 2016 are relatively small. At 76%, this share is significantly lower than among the non-Roma. The share of Roma assessing their health status as 'good' or 'very good' is 68%. More than a quarter of Roma feel they are restricted in their activities due to poor health and 22% have a longstanding illness or health problems.

There is still concern about low vaccination rates among the Roma, which in some countries are reported to contribute to higher premature mortality and mortality rates. Roma participation and empowerment in healthcare initiatives is considered a challenge, also due to low literacy and language barriers.

The Roma population is also disproportionately affected by communicable diseases. Persistently poor living conditions often result in a higher probability of serious illnesses and chronic diseases, even when access to healthcare is provided. Furthermore, little progress has been made with regard to preventive healthcare, as the Roma continue to have consistently lower child vaccination rates compared to the non-Roma.

The achievements most often mentioned by the NRCs are:

- vaccination campaigns and other prevention and detection programmes;
- improved hygiene, health conditions and access to healthcare;
- raised awareness;
- health mediation;
- multi-stakeholder cooperation involving national and local governments and civil society.

⁵⁰ [Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 7.

⁵¹ With the biggest increases in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal and Greece.

Challenges reported include:

- lack of coordination and effective communication between the national and local levels;
- difficulties in maintaining appropriate (national or EU) funding or staffing;
- lack of self-consciousness on health matters;
- lack of health insurance coverage among the Roma;
- insufficient knowledge of health professionals on Roma issues.

3.3.4. Recommendations

The most broadly used promising practices focus on:

- prevention via vaccination campaigns;
- training and employment of Roma health mediators.

It is important, however, for targeted support services to actively seek to improve health awareness, change behaviours and foster among the Roma the capacity for long-term self-reliance and an ability to engage with mainstream institutions, as a way to help diminish their dependence on permanent intermediaries and long-term parallel structures. Anti-discrimination measures targeting healthcare professionals should be prioritised.

Priorities require actions to:⁵²

- increase health insurance coverage, fill gaps in primary and specialised care provision, including reproductive and sexual health in disadvantaged areas;
- step up efforts to prevent and fight drug addiction, smoking, HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis, cardio-vascular diseases and premature birth;
- monitor and fight discrimination in access to health and sensitise health professionals to the needs of the Roma;
- ensure that targeted Roma health mediators help build long-term self-reliance among the Roma;
- improve nutrition and fight unhealthy living conditions targeting Roma women and families with children.

3.4. Housing

3.4.1. Background

Poor access to housing and public utilities has a negative impact on education, employment and health outcomes and adversely affects social inclusion overall. In addition, residential segregation, the lack of availability of suitable halting sites for non-sedentary Roma, and forced evictions have been key issues contributing to an unequal housing situation of the Roma.

The Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) provides protection and guarantees for equal treatment in access to and supply of goods and services, including housing. Access to secure housing with basic infrastructure is a core aspect of social inclusion. The provision of affordable, adequate and social housing is primarily within the responsibility of national and regional policies.

⁵² [Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 13.

The EU Framework for NRIS called on Member States to close the housing and essential services gap between the Roma and the rest of the population by:

- promoting non-discriminatory access to housing, including social housing;
- ensuring that actions addressing housing needs are a part of an integrated approach including, in particular, education, health, social affairs, employment and security, and desegregation measures;
- addressing the particular needs of non-sedentary Roma (e.g. providing access to suitable halting sites for non-sedentary Roma); and
- actively intervening with targeted programmes involving regional and local authorities.

The 2013 Council recommendation called on Member States to take effective measures to ensure equal treatment of the Roma in access to housing by means of measures aimed, among other things, at:

- eliminating any spatial segregation and promoting desegregation;
- promoting non-discriminatory access to social housing;
- providing halting sites for non-sedentary Roma, in proportion to local needs;
- ensuring access to public utilities (such as water, electricity and gas) and infrastructure for housing in compliance with national legal requirements.

3.4.2. Measures

The measures most commonly reported by the NRCPs to the Commission as being implemented under the NRIS involve:⁵³

- ensuring access to public utilities (water, electricity, gas) and infrastructure for housing;
- supporting desegregation;
- promoting non-discriminatory access to social housing.

Only a minority of Member States invest in integrated housing interventions targeting marginalised communities in the framework of local urban regeneration projects or use the ESIF for community-led local development or integrated territorial investments.

NRCPs highlight the following thematic areas as important, ranking them in terms of their relevance as follows:

- ensuring access to public utilities and infrastructure for housing;
- eliminating spatial segregation and promoting desegregation;
- promoting non-discriminatory access to social housing;
- ensuring that urban regeneration projects include integrated housing interventions for marginalised communities;
- promoting community-led local development and/or integrated territorial investments supported by the ESIF;
- providing halting sites for non-sedentary Roma.

⁵³ [Report on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 14.

3.4.3. Results

The Roma often live in areas where most neighbours are Roma too. A third of Roma households do not have tap water, just over half have an indoor flush toilet or shower and 78 % of the Roma live in overcrowded households.⁵⁴

In its Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma (MIDIS II), the FRA concludes that:⁵⁵

- as far as access to electricity is concerned, there is a slight improvement compared with the results of its 2011 Roma survey;
- the situation is worse with regard to access to clean drinking water through a connection to a water supply system with public access. The share of Roma living in households without tap water inside their dwelling is much higher than for the general population;
- looking at the various housing quality indicators as a whole, a substantial proportion of Roma live in households without access to needed public utilities and basic housing amenities. This puts them at risk of severe housing deprivation;
- while many Roma live in households without tap water inside the dwelling across the nine examined EU Member States, an even higher percentage live in households without a toilet and shower or bathroom inside their homes;
- a considerable number of Roma feel that pollution, grime and other environmental problems – such as smoke, dust and unpleasant smells or polluted water – are a problem.

The mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework for NRIS⁵⁶ concluded that housing disparities continue to be significant, with about 30 % of Roma still living without water within their dwellings and 36 % without toilet, shower, or bathroom. The gap between the Roma and the rest of the population in terms of access to electricity has been insignificant (96 % of Roma have access to electricity). The authors conclude that there has been a lack of major policy initiatives in Member States that could have contributed to shifting the housing conditions of the Roma. The open public consultation that was carried out as part of the above-mentioned mid-term review confirms the lack of progress between 2011 and 2016, with more than half (57.3 %) of respondents indicating that the housing situation had worsened due to higher levels of housing discrimination.

Member States' policy measures most often focus on:

- maintenance, provision and repair of municipal and social housing;
- infrastructure in Roma settlements;
- legislative measures, construction permits or legalisation of informal housing.

Explicit active desegregation, including the removal of slums, as well as integrated territorial measures or social/infrastructural support for the homeless is much less common as a central focus of investment.

⁵⁴ [Report on National Roma Integration Strategies: Key Conclusions](#), European Commission, 2019, p. 5.

⁵⁵ [Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings](#), European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, p. 33-35.

⁵⁶ [Mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, final report](#), European Commission, 2018, p. 41.

NRCs reported that the most significant achievements were in:

- the provision of access to social housing;
- the elimination of slums and spatial segregation;
- the provision of halting sites;
- the provision of access to public utilities (such as water, electricity and gas);
- the provision of infrastructure for housing;
- the legalisation of housing;
- urban regeneration.

Reported challenges include:

- spatial segregation;
- barriers before the Roma's access to housing in the private sector;
- public support for and legislation on access to social housing.

There is no evidence of actual or intended policy interventions to overcome residential segregation, and some countries are even witnessing a growth in the number and size of localities with concentrated, socially-excluded populations, often living in appalling conditions that lack basic infrastructure and access to basic public services.⁵⁷

3.4.4. Recommendations

According to the Commission, housing is the policy with the fewest examples of promising approaches common to several countries. It is also the area where a long-term, integrated and comprehensive approach has been found to be especially critical, including:

- complementing provision of housing with accompanying support combining elements of employment, education, and health and community development;
- embedding interventions in broader national policy and legislation on land and social housing.

Promoting spatial desegregation requires a targeted, coordinated and participatory process: engaging Roma beneficiaries in the design and implementation of community and individual housing options; combining infrastructural and human investments; and raising awareness to reduce ethnic tensions and overcome resistance from the majority in society.

Other areas that need to be prioritised include:

- developing the social housing stock to ensure improved access for the Roma;
- preventing forced evictions as part of a multi-stakeholder, broad housing approach;
- providing sufficient and culturally appropriate halting sites for non-sedentary Roma.

Priorities to be addressed include steps to:

- invest in affordable and appropriate social housing stock in integrated areas, and ensure that eligibility criteria are accessible to the Roma;
- provide housing assistance targeting the most vulnerable;
- legalise housing and prevent forced evictions;

⁵⁷ [A synthesis report on implementation of national Roma integration strategies](#), Roma civil monitor pilot project, European Commission, March 2018.

- combine comprehensive long-term desegregation with preparatory and accompanying measures building public support and inter-ethnic community relations, and ensure the participation of communities in design and implementation;
- ensure access to clean water, basic amenities and essential public services for all, with explicit safeguards for the Roma;
- fight discrimination in access to (social and private) housing;
- ensure the provision of sufficient, properly serviced and culturally appropriate halting sites for Travellers.

3.5. Anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism

3.5.1. Background

The Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC) lays down a framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin throughout the EU in relation to employment and training, education, social protection (including social security and healthcare), social advantages and access to, and supply of, goods and services, including housing.

The Council recommendation of 9 December 2013 on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States called on them to continue their efforts to ensure the effective practical enforcement of Directive 2000/43/EC, in particular by:

- ensuring that their national, regional and local administrative regulations are not discriminatory and do not result in segregation practices. The relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights should serve as a point of reference for the human rights compatibility of provisions and practices in this context;
- Implement, where relevant, desegregation measures concerning the Roma both regionally and locally. Policies and measures to combat segregation should be accompanied by appropriate training and information programmes, including training and information on human rights protection, addressed to local civil servants and representatives of civil society and the Roma themselves;
- ensure that forced evictions are in full compliance with EU law and other international human rights obligations, such as those under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Member States were also called on to implement measures to combat discrimination and prejudice against Roma, sometimes referred to as anti-gypsyism, in all areas of society. Such measures could include:

- raising awareness about the benefits of Roma integration both in Roma communities and among the general public;
- raising the general public's awareness of the diverse nature of societies, and sensitising public opinion to the inclusion problems Roma face, including, where relevant, by addressing those aspects in public education curricula and teaching materials;
- taking effective measures to combat anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech, and addressing racist, stereotyping or otherwise stigmatising language or other behaviours that could constitute incitement to discrimination against the Roma.

3.5.2. Measures

Anti-discrimination measures most reported by Member States include:

- fighting anti-gypsyism by raising awareness on the benefits of Roma inclusion;
- awareness raising about diversity;
- combatting anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech.

Few Member States invest in measures that seek to protect Roma women and children by fighting multiple discrimination, (domestic) violence, or underage and forced marriages. Only four Member States report investing in measures to ensure the effective enforcement of the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC). Even fewer refer to local or regional desegregation measures or to measures aimed at fighting trafficking in human beings. Only one Member State reports measures to prevent unlawful evictions or child begging; and to promote cross-border cooperation.

Member States most often invest in:

- promoting Roma culture and heritage as a way to raise awareness and fight anti-gypsyism indirectly among the general public;
- awareness-raising to directly fight discrimination and intolerance.

Other measures focus on:

- capacity development of institutions;
- Roma civil society;
- human rights monitoring mechanisms.

Key areas that received lesser focus were the provision of legal support and the empowerment of Roma women and desegregation. Only a few of the reported antidiscrimination measures targeted explicitly Roma youth or Roma women.

The NRCs reported to the Commission on the implementation of the following measures in 2017:

- fighting anti-gypsyism by raising awareness about the benefits of Roma integration
- fighting anti-gypsyism by raising awareness on diversity
- fighting anti-gypsyism by combatting anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech
- fighting violence, including domestic violence, against women and girls
- fighting (multiple) discrimination faced by children and women involving all relevant stakeholders
- fighting underage and forced marriages
- ensuring the effective practical enforcement of Directive 2000/43/EC
- fighting trafficking in human beings
- implementing desegregation measures regionally and locally
- ensuring that evictions are in full compliance with EU law and international human rights obligations
- fighting begging involving children, through the enforcement of the relevant legislation
- promoting cooperation among Member States in situations with a cross-border dimension.

3.5.3. Results

The Roma are still discriminated against across the EU: for instance, 43 % of them experience discrimination when trying to buy or rent housing. Furthermore, they are not sufficiently aware of their rights in terms of equality and need to develop greater trust in the law enforcement bodies.⁵⁸

The available data on Roma perceptions across the EU⁵⁹ show that 61 % of EU citizens believe that discrimination against the Roma is widespread in their country.

Compared to 2015, 64 % of Europeans (up 10 %) would feel comfortable about having daily contact with a Roma colleague and 49 % (up 9 %) would feel comfortable if one of their children was in a love relationship with a Roma. Over 60 % of EU citizens agree that society could benefit from improved integration of the Roma, which represents an increase by 8 % as compared to 2012. However, only 19 % think their country's efforts to integrate its Roma population are effective and 28 % think these efforts are moderately effective. This percentage is higher among people who identify themselves as Roma (29 %).

Available evidence shows that in 2011 the Roma were subject to a significant discrimination across the EU. On average, 46 % of the Roma people surveyed by the FRA in 2011 reported having been subject to discrimination because of their Roma ethnicity in the past 12 months – ranging from around 60 % in Italy, Czechia and Poland, to around 30 % in Romania, Bulgaria and Spain.

Eurobarometer surveys from 2012 also provide insights into the prevalence and nature of discrimination faced by the Roma. In 2012, 34 % thought that citizens in their country would feel uncomfortable if their children had Roma schoolmates, (28 % thought citizens would feel fairly comfortable and 31 % thought they would feel comfortable). The level of being uncomfortable with the Roma varied between the countries, with Slovakia and Czechia taking the lead in this respect.

The achievements most often mentioned by the NRCs were: improving the conditions of Roma women and children; combating anti-gypsyism by breaking stereotypes or promoting Roma culture and heritage; and involving all relevant players (public authorities, civil society and Roma communities) in efforts to promote anti-discrimination.

Several NRCs referred to challenges in improving access to legal protection and rights awareness, as well as difficulties in fighting against stereotypes and improving the situation of Roma women and children. The mere fact that several Member States – including some with large Roma communities and several with very high rates of perceived discrimination among Roma – did not report any anti-discrimination measures underlines the gravity of the challenges in this area.

Notwithstanding the fact that EU legislation has been fully incorporated into the domestic law of all five countries, discrimination against the Roma remains widespread and goes effectively unchallenged. Low independence, few resources and the limited mandate of the official bodies responsible for combating discrimination, a low level of rights awareness among many marginalised Roma communities, and widespread scepticism concerning enforcement of justice, as well as the lack of ethnically disaggregated data, are among the main causes of this persisting problem.⁶⁰

Despite the existing legal prohibition on the segregation of Roma children in special schools or in ethnically homogeneous settings, as well as rulings from national courts and European Court of

⁵⁸ [Report on National Roma Integration Strategies: Key Conclusions](#), European Commission, 2019.

⁵⁹ [Special Eurobarometer 493, 'Discrimination in the European Union', Fieldwork](#), May 2019.

⁶⁰ [A synthesis report on implementation of national Roma integration strategies](#), Roma civil monitor pilot project, European Commission, March 2018.

Human Rights judgments, the reports confirm that Roma children are still denied access to quality integrated education. Separate facilities are still being built with public funds and existing opportunities for active desegregation are not used. The infringement procedures against three Member States seem to have had little discernible impact on school segregation so far.

3.5.4. Recommendations

Experience with Roma inclusion actions shows that long-term change in any of the policy areas requires tackling anti-gypsyism and discrimination towards Roma, and building trust between Roma and non-Roma communities.

To succeed, Roma inclusion actions in all policy areas must be linked to common values and include awareness raising among the general public.

The fight against stereotypes, hate speech and hate crime requires building positive narratives on Roma among mainstream society and strengthening Roma identity, via specific targeted measures to fight anti-gypsyism and promote recognition for Roma history (including the Holocaust).

The most successful actions do not just align with, but rather transform mainstream structures and policies by fighting prejudices and stereotypes and building a positive image of Roma among policy-makers and other stakeholders.

The discrimination the Roma faced across Europe in 2011 was multi-faceted and affected their access to education, employment, housing and health, while also generating more, broader-ranging forms of social exclusion and poverty. The specific manifestations of discrimination in respect to these different policy areas are discussed further down.

Priorities to be addressed require actions to:

- develop ethnically disaggregated (anonymised) data collection to monitor anti-gypsyism, discrimination and the impact of public policies on Roma;
- develop actions to fight, raise awareness about, monitor and sanction anti-gypsyism, hate crime and hate speech (linked to broader anti-racism strategies) with Roma civil involvement targeting society as a whole;
- ensure the enforcement of equality legislation and tackle discriminatory treatment by law enforcement and other public bodies through thorough investigation, dissuasive sanctions, sensitisation and antidiscrimination training;
- support Roma access to justice with a focus on victims of multiple discrimination (women, LGBTI, non-citizen Roma), and reinforce the capacity of equality bodies to deal with discrimination against the Roma;
- set up Roma-led truth and reconciliation processes to explore, document and raise awareness about past abuses against Roma, and promote trust and reconciliation;
- empower the Roma to participate fully in political, cultural and social life and all stages of the policy process;
- follow a holistic, gender and child sensitive approach; fight child abuse, early marriages, begging involving children (through the enforcement of legislation protecting children rights), violence, including trafficking in human beings;
- alleviate the social costs of begging and maintain human dignity.

This study provides a review of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies (NRIS) up to 2020. It was produced at the request of the European Parliament's Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) to feed into the discussions regarding the post-2020 framework.

The study provides a synthesis of evaluations and opinions of the EU Framework for NRIS, focusing both on the architecture of this instrument and on the national policy measures that have been put in place in the main policy areas under the framework. It furthermore provides an appreciation of the coordination, consultation and monitoring structures under the framework and the way they work in practice. It also looks at the framework's interplay with other EU legal, funding and policy instruments. It then reviews the main policy objectives and the effect the framework has had on anti-discrimination and anti-gypsyism.

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