

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA IN EUROPE

European Roma Policy Coalition

Factsheet / Background

What is the European Roma Policy Coalition?

The Coalition is a network of national and international NGOs working on different aspects of discrimination against Roma people. The Coalition calls for the full realisation of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of Roma. Its key objective is the adoption of an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion, in accordance with international and European human rights instruments. The member organisations are: Amnesty International (AI); European Network Against Racism (ENAR), European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO), European Roma Information Office (ERIO), European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Minority Rights Group International (MRGI); Open Society Institute (OSI) and Spolu International Foundation (SF).

How will the Coalition achieve its aim?

The Coalition will work through awareness raising and targeted advocacy towards the EU institutions and Member States. It will use the experience and research of its members to input expertise into the design of an EU Strategy. Once a Strategy is adopted, the coalition will monitor its implementation at both EU and national level. It will continue to gather credible and systematic information on the situation of Roma communities in Europe to inform decision making at national and European levels.

Why do we need an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion?

Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe and are one of the most disadvantaged. An estimated 7-9 million Roma live in EU member states. To date there is no integrated and comprehensive EU policy that specifically targets Roma discrimination/integration. Where anti-discrimination laws have been adopted, implementation is either slow, inefficient or inexistent. The socio-economic gap between Roma and majority populations has caused social exclusion and unrest. Structural discrimination has been blatant in crucial areas such as access to housing (e.g. evictions), education and property rights. There is an unprecedented rise in anti-gypsyism in Europe, including in official speech. Roma communities migrate within Europe prompted, in many cases, by discrimination and other violations of their rights only to find themselves subject to the same problems in a new host country.

Discrimination constitutes a violation of the civil, political, economic and social rights of Roma women, men and children. All EU member states have an obligation under international and European human rights instruments to stop these violations and prevent their reoccurrence in their territories.

What is the added value of an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion?

An EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion will reflect the European dimension of Roma discrimination and the priority EU Member States and institutions need to give to the resolution of this problem. It will provide a comprehensive and cohesive approach to Roma discrimination and address the interdependence of the human rights violations suffered by Roma communities. As a roadmap for Member States, it will build on their few efforts so far, promote co-ordination of national policies and assist their implementation. It will allow a systematic exchange of good, tested, policies between Member States, as well as addressing the cross-border impact of Roma discrimination.

What should an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion look like?

An EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion should be developed around three dimensions:

- accountability of national authorities for their responsibility to protect Roma people from discrimination;
- equal access to education, health care and housing for Roma communities;
- empowerment of Roma communities through involvement and participation in the civic and economic life of the country.

the Strategy should be based on the following key guidelines:

- Thorough review of existing dispersed policies and funding mechanisms applicable to Roma;
- Meaningful consultation with and involvement of Roma communities and organisations;
- Complementarity of an EU Strategy with mainstreaming of Roma anti-discrimination and integration measures in relevant EU policies (e.g. education, employment, housing, health);
- Increased transparency and responsibility of national and EU authorities, including through the definitions of anti-discrimination and inclusion benchmarks and indicators, and efficient monitoring and reporting mechanisms;
- Synergy and co-operation with other European initiatives and institutions working on Roma rights;
- Support and promote research at national and European level with desegregated data on the situation of Roma communities.

What has the EU done so far?

All EU institutions have acknowledged the gravity of the situation of Roma in Europe and the need to address it, but this has not been matched by action.

The right of Roma to non-discrimination is covered by the European legal framework through the Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC). At policy level, this right was included in the Community Action Programme to combat discrimination (2002-2006). It was also part of the conditions for the 2004 accession round. None of these mechanisms has achieved structural and sustainable improvements in the situation of Roma. The Directive has not been adequately transposed and implemented in national jurisdictions. Most projects under the Action Programme were isolated and lacked strategic focus in both planning and implementation. Whatever has been achieved, it was neither sustainable nor paralleled by high level political commitment by the EU and Member States to prioritise and address this problem.

Since the expulsion of several Romanian Roma from Italy in early November 2007, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the Commission to pursue an overall strategy for social inclusion of the Roma. The 12 December 2007 European Council, "conscious of the very specific situation faced by Roma across the Union", invited the Commission to "examine existing policies and instruments".

Next steps

- EU Council should clearly acknowledge the political and collective responsibility to address discrimination against Roma, which affects millions in the EU.
- EU Council should express clear political support for an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion and explicitly invite the Commission to draft it as a matter of urgency;
- The Commission should draft the communication with a wide consultative process.

Resources on the situation of Roma in Europe:

<http://www.erionet.org/>; <http://www.errc.org/>; <http://www.spolu.nl/index.html>; <http://www.ergonetwork.org/>
<http://www.enar-eu.org/en/>; <http://www.soros.org/>; <http://www.amnesty.org/>

For further comment/background and interviews:

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