



EFC Forum for Roma Inclusion (A Joint Initiative of European Foundations)

FROM PRINCIPLES TO ACTION FOR ROMA INCLUSION

Response to the European Commission's Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies at up to 2020 (COM 2011/173/3)

The European Forum of Foundations warmly welcomes the Commission's initiative to create a EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. This initiative gives an important public signal of the European wide commitment of governments and of the EU itself to promote the economic and social inclusion of Roma. The Forum calls on the Council and the European Parliament to give full support to the Commission's proposals so as to create a new momentum for determined action in practice.

Having examined the Commission's proposal this week at its meeting in The Hague, the Forum draws attention to 5 key aspects, most specifically to the importance of Member States launching their national strategies this year.

1. The Forum urges the Commission to reaffirm that the common basic principles on Roma integration will form the centrepiece governing each Member State's strategy, to be reflected fully in its legislation and policy initiatives. The 10 basic principles taken together should thus provide an explicit overall coherence to the Member States' shared commitment to achieve much greater progress in this field.

Members States should be called upon to take the necessary steps to ensure that their national strategies, including the 10 principles, are embedded in the policies of their regions and local areas. Furthermore, the national action plans should be communicated widely within each Member State to the general public so as to promote a two-way process in changing the mind sets of the majority of people as well as Roma themselves. Active cooperation engaging local authorities and the media, especially local, should be initiated to raise public awareness and change attitudes.

2. The Commission's text rightly calls for 'strong' and 'robust' monitoring mechanisms, but falls short of defining them adequately. It is essential that the EU framework should specify common guidelines for the content of the national strategies and for the design of monitoring mechanisms be defined and agreed for each level: Member State, regional and/or local, and European. The common characteristic to all levels that is crucial to this commitment is to establish an interdepartmental, integrated approach which can be seen to have responsibility for the delivery of the national strategy and the monitoring of its outcomes. This should be a first priority for Member State authorities to give a good example to their regional and local authorities. Roma involvement in these monitoring arrangements at all levels must be guaranteed.

So far as the Commission itself is concerned, it is vital that the Commission has the full capacity to review the Member State reports of their national strategies and at the same time continue to assess the policy coherence of the use of EU Structural Funds with the national strategies. The Forum calls on the Commission to establish an appropriate mechanism to fulfil this important coordinating and inter-sectoral responsibility.

As the Commission's text indicates, moreover, it is important for the Commission to ensure that the monitoring results of the implementation of the EU anti-discrimination directive are fed into this annual review process in future.

As in the case of disability and children's rights, the Forum recommends that Member States should arrange for independent 'shadow' reports to be produced with the cooperation of civil society, including Roma. This would contribute to a much broader and deeper understanding of the national strategies and of the issues at stake and will ensure that Civil Society have a shared commitment to change and reform.

3. The EU Structural Funds, present and future, are clearly of great significance, provided they are mobilised to underpin the new EU strategic framework for Roma inclusion. In the forthcoming revision of the Regulations of the Structural Funds, the Forum calls on the Commission to propose that explicit reference be made to the national strategies as the necessary reference framework for the use of the funds in the Member States.

The local managing bodies within each Member State responsible for the distribution of these Structural Funds should be required by EU Regulation to comply with these conditions and to report on their implementation, taking into account consultation with and active participation of Roma.

4. The Forum also welcomes the priority awarded to investment in education but regrets the absence in its communication of measurable outcomes and benchmarks against which to assess effective progress. This should be addressed as a key priority in further discussions between the Commission and the Council.

We welcome the Belgian Presidency text on 'Early Childhood Development and the Inclusion of Roma Families' and seek the assurance of the Commission and of the Council that its well-balanced conclusions be fully exploited in the forthcoming deliberations and decisions of the Council, and taken into account in the design of the national strategies.

5. The Forum is aware of a body of considerable experience in Europe on good and also unsuccessful practices in promoting the inclusion of Roma. It is surprised that there is no reference in the Commission's text to the potential role and contribution in this regard of the Roma Education Fund.

The Forum invites the Commission to consider 3 proposals to promote exchange of experience:

- i. The creation or designation of a European clearing house mechanism to exchange experience of good practice and of the conditions and criteria required to assess it.
- ii. Commissioning the production of an annual report analysing good practice in Europe, modelled on the positive experience of the report which is already produced by the Commission on Integration and Migration in Europe.
- iii. Provision of support for capacity building of Roma civil organisations.

The Foundation sector in Europe already plays an important role throughout Europe in promoting innovation and reform in tackling economic and social exclusion. As independent actors, often working at local levels, foundations have developed multiple partnerships with other bodies. The Forum's new partnership with Eurocities on Roma questions is an excellent example.

The Forum stands ready to collaborate with the Commission in implementing this new EU framework.

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