



Recommendations of the European Forum of Foundations for Roma Inclusion to the Second European Roma Summit (Cordoba, 8-9 April 2010)

From principles to action for the inclusion of Roma in Europe

1. Introduction

The European Forum for Roma Inclusion was created in June 2009, and is hosted by the European Foundation Centre (EFC). The policy recommendations developed during the earlier phase of collaboration between foundations were presented to the first European Roma Summit held in Brussels in September 2008 in the form of a Weinheim Declaration, which was also transmitted to the EU Institutions and to Member States.

Building on the Weinheim Declaration, the Forum has conducted a further review of the situation of Roma, based on the practical experience of foundations and notably of the Roma Education Fund. The Forum welcomes the growing indications of the concern and commitment of the EU institutions and Member States to address this issue, as a follow up to the request of the European Council (December 2007). The Forum considers the holding of this second European Roma Summit in Cordoba in April 2010 as an opportune moment to add momentum to policies and actions which can engage and support Roma, and which make better use of the potential of Roma themselves to share responsibility with mainstream society for making the changes required.

In particular the Forum welcomes the agreement of the Council (June 2009) to an initial set of Common Basic Principles for the inclusion of Roma which can serve as the basis of policies to be pursued both at EU level and by and within Member States. It also welcomes the creation of the integrated European Platform as an indication of the serious commitment of the EU and Member States to open up a process of change in addressing Roma related issues, by promoting dialogue and exchange of experience to inform policy makers and practitioners in promoting the inclusion of Roma.

The Forum is pleased to have this opportunity to present its reflections and recommendations to the Cordoba Summit with a view to ensuring that this second European Roma Summit delivers practical, visible and effective actions which can be appreciated both by Roma and by the general public. For the Summit to be credible, the Forum calls upon the Spanish Presidency and the European Commission to confirm at the outset of the Summit their intention to present the conclusions and recommendations of the Summit to the EU institutions and to all Member State authorities.

2. Lack of Effective Action on the Ground and Political Leadership

The Forum expresses its deep concern at the continuing limited effectiveness of action on the ground, the persistent recurrence of blockages in the relations between the Roma and mainstream populations and the gaps of implementation of policies aimed at combating xenophobia and racially motivated violence and at promoting Roma inclusion, which are evident at national, regional and local levels. The Forum's concern at the lack of political will, amid growing numbers of anti-Roma incidents, is heightened by the impact of the present economic and financial crisis on the overall European social and employment situation and especially its aggravation of the structural difficulties which block Roma inclusion.

3. Responsibility of the European Commission

The Forum welcomes the introduction within the new Commission of a Commissioner charged with a portfolio responsibility for fundamental rights, including Roma rights. Commissioner Reding, who now holds this portfolio, will have the responsibility of ensuring with President Barroso the necessary coordination and cooperation between all services in the Commission to develop and apply a comprehensive and cross-sectoral set of policies and programmes aimed at Roma inclusion.

The Forum recommends that Commissioner Reding should be invited to meet annually with the Platform to report on the Commission's overall analysis of progress and obstacles in this field, and to present the Commission's action plans. This annual encounter should also involve the participation of the Presidency of the Council, representatives of the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and EU Agencies.

4. Application of the Common Basic Principles

The Forum welcomes the establishment of an initial set of Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion which contains a number of positive features. We consider it essential that these principles should be embedded in the legal and policy frameworks of the Member States so that they can serve as an explicit EU-wide reference to govern current and future policies for the inclusion of Roma in Europe.

The Forum recommends that the proposed annual reporting by Commissioner Reding (see 3 above) should include a review of the extent to which the Common Basic Principles are being applied in the legal and policy frameworks of the Member States.

The Forum also urges the Platform to recommend that two key points should be added to the initial formulation of the principles adopted by the Council:

- Reference to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has now been integrated into the new EU (Lisbon) Treaty;

- Reference should be made, as is the case in the Common Basic Principles on the integration of immigrants adopted by the Council (Document 14615/04 of 19 December 2004), to the importance of promoting a two-way process which would engage both Roma and the mainstream society to make a success of inclusion policies, with mutual recognition of their rights and responsibilities.

5. Integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion

Whilst the Forum recognizes the potential value of the initiative to establish the integrated European Platform for Roma inclusion, it considers that the Platform's status, functions and reporting obligations require further clarification and consolidation. In its conclusions adopted on 8 June 2009 the Council anticipated the idea of 'further developing the structure of the Platform'. In this context we suggest that four points require immediate attention:

- The need to give greater public visibility to the Platform's work and recommendations for action;
- The need to clarify its consultative status vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council, and for transparent arrangements to be set up for the transmission of its conclusions and recommendations to the Member States as well as to the EU institutions;
- The need for an identifiable secretariat to service the Platform's meetings and work programme, involving Roma in the staff team;
- The need for procedures to govern the work of the Platform, in particular agreement of its work programme, both annually and for the medium term.

6. EU Structural Policies and Funds

The present and future Structural Policies and Funds (ESF, ERDF, and EAFRD) are of vital importance in contributing to the range of policies needed to make possible the social and economic inclusion of Roma in their communities in each Member State and throughout Europe. The new pilot scheme which is to be launched via the ERDF and which focuses on early childhood, micro-credits and awareness-raising measures points the way forward in a promising way. However, a much larger scale effort is required to address the complex challenges faced by Roma as the most disadvantaged minority in Europe.

The Forum recommends that the new Regulations for the Structural Funds for the period 2013/4 to 2020 should be adapted to include operations which would target Roma and other marginalized groups, and would embed the Common Basic Principles adopted by the Council. This should cover housing, education and training, integrated community development and health aspects. Priority support should be given in the Member States

to the provision of early childhood services and to those operations which actively engage Roma and their local community in the design, implementation and evaluation of the operations (including the training and appointment of Roma mediators and assistants).

To this end the Forum recommends that the Summit should call upon President Barroso and the Commission to include the social and economic importance of addressing Roma inclusion in the Commission's overall strategy for EU 2020 which is now being developed by the incoming Commission. This strategic text will set the policy reference framework for the EU's future financial perspectives and especially the future use of EU Structural Funds and the associated action plans of Member States.

The explicit formulation of Roma inclusion as one of the European priorities for the future strategy is therefore of crucial significance. The Platform could be invited to comment on and contribute to the formulation of the EU 2020 text and thus also to the formulation of the new Regulations in due course.

The Managing Bodies designated by and within Member States have the main responsibility for decisions on the precise allocation of funding within each Member State. In the new Regulations, the Managing Bodies should be required to create effective and transparent procedures to ensure that the common basic principles are applied in deciding operations to be financed, so that Roma benefit from the available funding. They should be required to monitor and report on the results of the operations supported by EU funds and their impact on Roma communities.

7. The Vital Role of the Local Level

For there to be a real difference to the living and working conditions of Roma and their families, and to address the persistent policy blockages to inclusion of Roma, action taken at the local level is the most decisive. This is the level where specific measures can be taken, appropriate to each local setting, with the active participation of Roma and members of the mainstream local population. Sustainable solutions which can have a lasting, positive impact will require the commitment of local authorities and it is essential to mobilize the leaders of the local authorities to set high standards in promoting community cohesion. Organisations such as Eurocities and other European associations of local and regional authorities should be encouraged by the Commission to play their part in the transfer of good practice throughout Europe, ensuring that the practical experience of local initiatives inform and influence the policy orientations of Member States.

Joined up coordination and cooperation between different local services are essential, since Roma and other marginalized groups do not live their lives in policy silos. An integrated approach to policy formulation, built on evidence of good practice, is vital to maximize the impact of local initiatives. It should engage the whole range of local services and provide open methods of consultation with Roma and civil society organisations generally.

The local initiatives sponsored by local authorities should involve Roma in their design, implementation and evaluation and include special efforts to build the capacity of Roma by equipping them with the skills and experience to break new ground and broker effective social and economic measures of inclusion.

The Forum plans to launch a transnational network of localities, including rural areas, to explore and highlight good policies and practices with a view to serving as a flagship project to encourage parallel efforts on a larger scale and to complement EU-backed initiatives. The Forum is open to cooperation with other bodies to co-sponsor and develop such a network so as to scale up its potential impact.

8. Priority Areas for Action

As originally proposed in the Weinheim Declaration (presented to the first European Roma Summit held in Brussels), the Forum continues to stress the case for strategic investment by the EU and Member States in three areas which can contribute to substantive improvement in the lives of Roma. These are: the critical importance of the period of early childhood (0 to 8), the transition of young people from education to adult and working life, and awareness-raising to eradicate prejudice and stereotyping and build a collective commitment to social cohesion as well the need to promote Roma rights.

The Forum also recognises the essential importance of good quality education of Roma throughout their lives, as for all citizens, and stresses the continuing urgency of reducing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. The Forum therefore recommends even closer collaboration between Member States and the Roma Education Fund in planning explicit, but not exclusive, targeting of Roma in programmes concerned with early school drop-outs and the lack of basic skills and qualifications of many school-leavers. In this latter context, Member States should be urged to encourage local authorities and local civil society to reinforce their actions to address these problems.

The Forum is organising workshops to explore these priority themes and is prepared to collaborate with the European Platform in furthering collaboration to build up experience and proposals to address these themes and to identify promising lines of action for the future.

a) The Period of Early Childhood.

The Forum welcomes the report of the Commission (Commission staff working document - Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training: Indicators and Benchmarks 2009) which stressed the strategic importance of investment in early childhood education and its impact on all children and most especially the most disadvantaged. We also note the importance the EU has placed on the early years, considering the Barcelona targets proposed by the year 2015 and the Education and Training targets proposed by the year 2020, both of which aim to establish at least 2 years of early childhood education as compulsory.

Furthermore, noted economists, including a Nobel Prize winner, have demonstrated that investing in early childhood is one of the most economically efficient public policies, and, further, that it promotes social inclusion by reducing the gaps in achievement for disadvantaged children. A strong start also prevents future social problems that are more expensive and difficult to address. At no other point in the human development cycle are investments as effective.

Universal coverage of services for children, the ideal objective for government policy, can only be effectively universal when it is clear that the most disadvantaged are reached. Throughout Europe Roma children are among the most severely disadvantaged. Well under a quarter of Roma children (and in many countries only a handful) participate in early childhood education and development programmes. Health statistics in some communities are worse than in the developing world

Early childhood begins with the mother and baby and the provision of prenatal services and carries through to the age of 8, while a child is in the early years of primary school. The experience drawn from the work of foundations demonstrates that high quality interventions reach Roma communities most effectively when municipalities respond to the needs identified by and with Roma themselves.

It is also important to recognize that approaches embedded in the communities which service not only Roma but other poor populations have helped with better integration whilst also addressing the acute needs of Roma children. Roma children do better when Roma role models are visible in professional positions of care and education and when health, education and other service professionals are trained to respect and respond to diversity in the populations they serve. The experience of the Forum shows that where services target multiple needs of children (for example, linking provision of an early learning programme with parent education, especially maternal literacy, access to clean piped water for the community, and a hot meal during the day to combat hunger), they will be more cost-effective and better results will be achieved.

The Forum calls on the Cordoba Summit to draw attention to the critical importance of investment in the period of early childhood and its long – term social and economic payoff for societies. We recommend that:

- The Member States should be urged to develop with the Commission a set of common guidelines to inspire their policies with regard to the provision of care and education to young children aged 0 to 7/8;
- Special attention should be given to the initial period from birth to 3, with access to a combination of quality health, education, protection and economic support services;
- Thereafter, Member States should seek to ensure that every Roma child should have access to two years of mainstream, quality pre-school education, a service available to almost all other children across Europe. Evidence has shown that

special attention should be made to insure a smooth transition from preschool into primary school, by linking institutions, curricula and teaching methods.

b) Transition from Education to Adult and Working Life

The period of transition from education to work is critically important to all young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and most at risk. We recommend that:

- School-community cooperation schemes need to include Roma young people and special efforts made to provide effective guidance and counseling arrangements to develop the potential of all young people;
- Measures to promote entrepreneurship education and local community initiatives designed to empower young people to take responsibility and initiative should deliberately include Roma;
- The use of micro-credit schemes drawing on the rich experience in the developing world should be encouraged to promote economic and labour market activity, with a focus on young people transiting from education to earning activities.

c) Combating anti-Romani Stereotypes and Promoting Roma Rights

The initiatives taken in Member States and at the European level should focus on treating Roma as equals in terms of their dignity and rights, rather than on counteracting the negative perceptions with folkloric approaches, urging the public to appreciate Romani cultures. In this context, we consider that the Roma rights movement can continue to be mobilised to serve as a driving force to support promotion of the EU equality agenda as a whole. To this end, the wider moves in European countries to define both the rights and responsibilities of all people in their territory and under their jurisdiction, whatever their ethnic origin, need to include Roma. Commitment to such a two way process is an essential precondition to successful policies.

The European Forum of Foundations itself would also wish to contribute to the priority of awareness-raising by developing a flagship transnational project for the training of Roma and non-Roma journalists and media specialists to develop the potential of the media to influence the public on the equal worth of the Roma, change perceptions and promote good relations among Roma and non-Roma while fighting anti Roma prejudice and inequality. This project could also be designed to raise awareness of the need to inform Roma about their rights in the face of discrimination.

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NOTE: Further information on the EFC Forum for Roma Inclusion and its work may be obtained from the website of the European Foundation Centre (EFC) at: www.efc.be
Copies of the Weinheim Declaration may also be obtained from the EFC.