

**Committee of the Regions****ECOS-V-048****104th plenary session, 28-29 November 2013****OPINION****ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGIES****THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- welcomes the Communication from the Commission as tangible evidence of EU commitment towards promoting Roma communities integration and combatting the discrimination that they frequently experience, by means of national integration strategies;
- supports the Commission's prioritisation of several structural preconditions that are important for a successful implementation of the integration strategies, notably working more closely with local and regional authorities and allocating proportionate financial resources;
- acknowledges that Roma women experience multiple discrimination and commits local and regional authorities to working with national government agencies and civil society to tackle this issue;
- reiterates the need to provide adequate funds to local and regional authorities who, through their policies play a strategic role in securing the inclusion of Roma children in pre-school and school systems;
- stresses that Roma integration strategies should be consistent with EU strategies for reducing poverty and social and economic exclusion, and calls for specific programmes and initiatives to be devised and implemented at local and regional level on the basis of concrete, measurable objectives;
- reiterates the importance of allocating appropriate financial and human resources to local authorities in order to enable them to contribute effectively to all phases of the implementation of Roma integration strategies.

Rapporteur

Roger Stone (UK/PES), Member of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Reference documents

Communication on Steps Forward in Implementing National Roma Integration Strategies
COM(2013) 454 final

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member
States COM(2013) 460 final

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions – Roma Integration Strategies

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments: promoting integration and tackling discrimination

1. welcomes the Communication from the Commission as tangible evidence of EU commitment towards promoting Roma communities¹ integration and combatting the discrimination that they frequently experience, by means of national integration strategies;
2. recalls that, with an estimated population of 10-12 million in Europe (of whom six million live in the EU), Roma people are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe. Most Roma are EU citizens;
3. the size and the social and economic situation of the Roma population are different in each region and Member State; therefore national approaches to Roma inclusion should be tailored to the specific circumstances and needs on the ground, including by adopting or continuing to pursue policies that address marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as Roma, in a broader context;
4. believes that the EU institutions and Member States have a joint responsibility to improve Roma people's social inclusion and integration. Recalls that tackling the discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion faced by Roma people is a Treaty obligation and legal requirement², in terms of combating discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation. Therefore strongly condemns any form of discrimination against Roma communities;
5. notes that national policies rightly designed to promote and govern compliance with the rule of law among the Roma people must under no circumstances cast doubt on or negate outright their right, as citizens of a Member State (not stateless), to European citizenship. The Committee deplores any use of confused expulsion procedures designed to rule out reception of Roma people without good reason and rejecting any attempt at integration. It calls on the EU to clarify this matter;
6. condemns stereotyping and limited access to public services due to perceived cultural differences. Reiterates its support for the Commission's efforts to tackle the problems faced by Roma communities in terms of poverty, labour market barriers and access to housing and

¹ Consistent with the Communication, the term "Roma" here refers to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom) and also includes Travellers..

² Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

healthcare, by targeting the preconditions for successful implementation of integration strategies; as these problems have still not been adequately solved, calls for efforts to be stepped up, inter alia by assigning more responsibilities to local and regional authorities;

7. stresses that integration is a two way process. In this respect, organisations representing Roma, should inform the Roma societies of the benefits that they can acquire from integrating well in the host country as well as their obligations that derive from residing in a country;
8. supports the Commission's prioritisation of several structural preconditions that are important for a successful implementation of the integration strategies, notably working more closely with local and regional authorities and allocating proportionate financial resources;

Implementation of the EU strategy

9. calls on the European Commission to define clear and measurable targets and indicators for those Member States having a Roma community, monitoring progress on all four pillars, including co-operation with local and regional authorities;
10. reiterates the importance for Member States to adopt a comprehensive, multi-sectorial and coordinated integration strategy. Indeed, the main policy areas identified by the EU Framework Strategy are interlocking issues. The EU and the Member States are unable to solve every problem through 'top-down' strategies that seek to lever Roma communities from above and should rely on cooperation with all actors at all levels;
11. calls on the European Commission to establish more robust monitoring mechanism for more effective evaluation of progress in meeting set targets for Member States having a Roma community as well as recommending practical measures to be undertaken by such Member States;
12. regrets that the Commission document barely touches on efforts in integrating Roma in the newest EU Member State as well as EU candidate and potential candidate countries, some of which have significant Roma population in dire need of support, their situation having been caused or worsened by exclusion and discrimination;
13. calls on the EU candidate and potential candidate countries to continue adopting anti-discrimination legislation, and to develop/revise their own national Roma integration strategies, in participation with their local and regional governments, and to include measurable targets and provision on obligation for regular publishing of the achievements;
14. welcomes the idea of establishing a network of National Contact Points for Roma to facilitate multilateral exchanges of best practices, peer-learning and co-operation; calls for inclusion of representatives of local and regional authorities as well as civil society organisations into the

network. Such a platform should include representatives from EU candidate and potential candidate countries;

15. recognises the work of the Congress of local and regional authorities (Council of Europe), notably its resolution “The situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities”³. Calls on the EU institutions to work more closely with the Council of Europe on improving the status of Roma, including supporting the recently-established European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, and support to the very successful "Dosta!" campaign;
16. calls on the Member States to ensure that Roma have protection under international law and in particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁴;
17. calls for policies, strategies and funding on Roma to explicitly include migrant Roma moving from other Member States and from third countries, and not only established Roma populations;
18. proposes that the European Commission calls on Member States and local and regional authorities to establish mentoring schemes to provide links between Roma and public authorities and widen work opportunities for Roma;
19. stresses that the role of civil society should not just be advisory: it should play an active part in implementing and monitoring national strategies;
20. reiterates the importance of involving at all levels of governance representatives of Roma communities in the formation of policies and strategies relevant to Roma integration;
21. acknowledges that Roma women experience multiple discrimination and commits local and regional authorities to working with national government agencies and civil society to tackle this issue, for example by devising strategies that actively involve them and give them responsibilities in prevention and integration programmes;

Funding

22. strongly welcomes the Commission's recommendation that Roma integration be explicitly included in the partnership agreements for the programming period 2014-2020;
23. calls for a more “dynamic approach” when it comes to allocation of funds to better address the different needs in different parts of Europe, ensuring effective support for those areas with higher than average Roma populations and/or significant influx of Roma population;

³ Congress Resolution 333, October 2011 (<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1855297>).

⁴ Council of Europe, 1995 (www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/).

furthermore, calls for clear, lasting and dynamic support for regional and local authorities that are already implementing or are planning to implement specific plans for the development and promotion of the Roma;

24. reiterates the need to provide adequate funds to local and regional authorities who, through their policies in the areas of child protection, early childhood services and promoting the right to education, play a strategic role in securing the inclusion of Roma children in pre-school and school systems;
25. considers that civil society organisations representing, or advocating for Roma must have better access to public funding (including EU funds) for developing and implementing integration policies;
26. suggests co-ordinating resources available for promoting Roma integration from various funding streams more effectively. Such a thematic approach would be immensely helpful to local and regional authorities with substantial Roma populations to deal effectively with new challenges and provide early opportunities for preventing their exclusion, and to promote links with the local communities;
27. stresses that one-size-fits-all policies may be counterproductive. Policies regarding Roma which are based on individuals and pay attention to encouraging, stimulating and rewarding individual initiatives especially regarding employment and self-employment, will be more productive. For example, on systematic profiling and training of individuals and families, support for new enterprise and for education; paying special attention to talented Roma students;

Children and education: a key factor in integration

28. recognises that the Roma population is young; 35.7% are under 15 compared to 15.7% across the EU population, with average age being 24 in Roma, compared to 40 across the EU. The vast majority of working age Roma lack the education to find sustainable jobs, highlighting the importance of investment in education for Roma children to enable successful entry into the labour market and integration into society;
29. believes that for any integration programme to be successful, an emphasis on focused education of the majority is as important as the education of minorities;
30. reiterates the need for a more holistic approach to integration and suggests ensuring basic literacy and numeracy of parents as a key to achieving these skills in the education of Roma children, as for other children;
31. calls for the end of practice of segregation and placing of Roma children in schools with learning disabilities, as well as segregation in mainstream schools;

32. considers that practices of positive discrimination should be introduced only with the utmost care and on a limited scale, to avoid compromising principles of equal rights and opportunities;
33. considers that actions should be taken in order to encourage the training of teachers and students to be more tolerant to Roma;
34. stresses that segregation in schools should be avoided and integrated education in school should be the norm in order to prevent exclusion and segregation from the majority. Indeed, the Roma themselves should play an active role in the demolition of the barriers of hostility by including the parents in education and early education;
35. considers that in order to prevent the marginalisation and exclusion of Roma children, action is needed from a very early age, by ensuring education and care for pre-school children;
36. considers that employment of more Roma teachers and teaching assistants could actively reduce the ethnic tensions in schools;
37. shares concerns that Roma children are at higher risk of more severe and extreme poverty than any other minority group in Europe;
38. calls on the Member States to adopt effective strategies to combat child labour, the involvement of minors in begging, the practice of arranged marriages and marriages with minors, and to combat human trafficking more effectively;
39. recalls its previous opinions on Roma⁵ which stressed the need for full involvement of local and regional authorities and Roma communities in work on national integration and social exclusion policies;

Role and involvement of local and regional governments

40. reiterates that local and regional authorities are the level of governance with most responsibilities for the integration of Roma populations;
41. stresses that only well-established working partnerships between all stakeholders, including civil society organisations and local and regional authorities, can result in the design of effective Roma integration strategies. Believes that the current top-down approach is failing to produce a satisfactory outcome;

⁵ “An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020” (CdR 247/2011 fin); “The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe” (CdR 178/2010 fin).

42. considers that the migration of Roma changes the characteristics of Roma populations and their experiences of social exclusion within local areas and requires different models of intervention to achieve integration, thus a centralised “one size fits all” strategy is unlikely to be successful. Therefore believes that a more decentralised approach would be more effective in tackling the issue;
43. stresses that Roma integration strategies should be consistent with EU strategies for reducing poverty and social and economic exclusion, and calls for specific programmes and initiatives to be devised and implemented at local and regional level on the basis of concrete, measurable objectives;
44. expresses concern that only 20 Member States have involved local and regional authorities in a structured dialogue for the implementation of the national Roma Strategies; that only 12 Member States have promoted the exchange of experience and cooperation among local authorities and only 15 Member States have allocated resources for Roma integration to local and regional authorities. Calls therefore on Member State governments to involve local and regional authorities more actively in developing national Roma integration strategies;
45. stresses the need to step up the fight against the discrimination and racism faced by Roma, both by making national civil society more aware of the social and economic benefits of Roma inclusion, and by making the Roma themselves more aware of their rights and obligations;
46. suggests that sanctions such as loss of financial benefits must be part of any scheme or initiative involving public subsidies. Sanctions should only be imposed when agreed patterns of conduct are violated or when the law is broken. Indeed, efforts made to reduce long term dependency on the state by improving the employment situation for Roma alongside promoting income from paid work that which exceeds the income from unemployment benefits is to be encouraged;
47. calls on the European Commission to disclose more specific data on the involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the national Roma Strategies;
48. calls for the establishment of a Local and Regional Authority contact point in each Member State to strengthen dialogue and ensure involvement;
49. calls on the government agencies to support and facilitate adult educational and training programmes to enable the Roma population gain specific skills that are in demand. The private sector should be involved in the preparation and running such training programmes. For example, seasonal labour contracts can be an effective and legal way of providing members of the Roma minority with jobs in the free markets;

50. reiterates the importance of allocating appropriate financial and human resources to local authorities in order to enable them to contribute effectively to all phases of the implementation of Roma integration strategies;

Subsidiarity and proportionality

51. in its previous opinion⁶ the CoR evaluated compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as set out under Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, as follows:
- the Commission's proposal complies with the principle of subsidiarity, since the transnational character of the European Roma community, and the shared aspects of social exclusion that this community faces in various parts of Europe, are such that the measures proposed can best be achieved at EU level;
 - the measures adopted do not introduce new legal instruments as, firstly, they fall within the scope of the open method of coordination, and secondly, many of them are based on existing legislative frameworks, in line with the principle of proportionality;

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATION (COM(2013) 460 final)

Amendment 1

Point 4.2

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
They should involve regions, local authorities and local civil society in reviewing, managing, implementing and monitoring their national strategies. Relevant stakeholders should be involved as regards partnership agreements and operational programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds. Central and local authorities should cooperate constantly in the implementation of the strategies. To this end, the Member States should allocate sufficient funding to local public authorities to facilitate the implementation of targeted sets of policies at local level.	They should involve regions, local authorities and local civil society in reviewing, managing, implementing and monitoring their national strategies. Relevant stakeholders should be involved as regards <u>the drafting and implementation</u> partnership agreements and operational programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds. Central <u>National, regional</u> and local authorities should cooperate constantly in the implementation of the strategies. To this end, the Member States should allocate sufficient funding to <u>regional and/or</u> local public authorities to facilitate the implementation of targeted sets of policies at <u>regional and/or</u> local level.

⁶ CdR 247/2011 fin

Reason

Amendment 2

Point 4.7

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>The Member States should provide National Contact Points for Roma integration with adequate mandate, financial and human resources so that they can effectively coordinate the cross-sectoral implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies at national and local level. They should ensure that National Contact Points for Roma integration are consulted during the decision-making processes regarding the definition, funding and implementation of relevant policies. The National Contact Points for Roma integration should facilitate the participation and involvement of Roma civil society in the implementation of national Roma integration strategies and local action plans.</p>	<p>The Member States should provide National Contact Points for Roma integration with adequate mandate, financial and human resources so that they can effectively coordinate the cross-sectoral implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies at national, <u>regional</u> and local level. They should ensure that National Contact Points for Roma integration are consulted during the decision-making processes regarding the definition, funding and implementation of relevant policies. The National Contact Points for Roma integration should facilitate the participation and involvement of Roma civil society in the implementation of national Roma integration strategies and <u>regional or</u> local action plans. <u>The National Contact Points for Roma integration should be clearly identifiable, including on the internet.</u></p>

Reason

Amendment 3

Point 5.4

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>On this basis, the Commission will monitor the situation closely and will assess in three years after its adoption the need to revise and update this Recommendation.</p>	<p>On this basis, the Commission will monitor the situation closely and will assess in <u>30 months</u> three years after its adoption the need to revise and update this Recommendation.</p>

Reason

Leaving the European Commission one year, i.e. until June 2016, to evaluate the implementation of this recommendation may entail the risk of not integrating possible conclusions into the mid-term review of the structural funds regulations.

Brussels, 28 November 2013

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

III. PROCEDURE

Title	Roma Integration Strategies
Reference(s)	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Steps forward in implementing national Roma Integration Strategies. COM(2013) 454 final Proposal for a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member State. COM(2013) 460 final
Legal basis	Article 307(1) TFEU
Procedural basis	Optional referral
Date of Commission letter	8 May 2013
Date of President's decision	25 July 2013
Commission responsible	Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS)
Rapporteur	Roger Stone (UK/PES) Member of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Analysis	6 August 2013
Discussed in commission	2 October 2013
Date adopted by commission	2 October 2013
Result of the vote in commission	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	28 November 2013
Previous Committee opinions	EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, CdR 247/2011 fin ⁷ Opinion on the social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe, CdR 178/2010 fin ⁸
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	N/A

⁷ [OJ C 54, 23/2/2012, p. 13](#)

⁸ [OJ C 42, 10/2/2011, p. 23](#)