



EUROPEAN ROMA INFORMATION OFFICE

Recommendations of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) to the European Commission and the Hungarian EU Presidency on the crisis map against poverty and social exclusion

In 21st century Europe, an alarmingly vast number of Europeans remain trapped in poverty. The European Commission estimates that almost 80 million Europeans live below the poverty line¹. ERIO particularly welcomes both the Hungarian government's and European Commission's increasingly strong emphasis on reducing poverty, fighting social exclusion and promoting the social inclusion of the Roma. However, if poverty is to be fought successfully, its various dimensions need to be tackled with a multifaceted poverty alleviation approach. ERIO welcomes the Hungarian Presidency's strong emphasis on a territorial approach to alleviate Roma poverty and exclusion and strongly believes this can contribute to improve the marginalised Roma communities in Europe. As a promoter of Roma rights and inclusion, ERIO would like to contribute to the European Commission and the Hungarian EU Presidency by offering recommendations on the Europe-wide crisis map to fight poverty and social exclusion and on policy interventions at both EU and national levels in vital areas for Roma integration.

1. Recommendations for a Europe-wide crisis map against poverty and social exclusion

1.1 Territorial approach to fight poverty and social exclusion

ERIO welcomes the creation of a Europe-wide crisis map and believes that the use of a territorial approach can contribute to improve disadvantaged micro-regions and achieve the EU objective to take 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

¹ European Commission (2009) 'Poverty and social exclusion'. *Special Eurobarometer 321*, Brussels. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_321_en.pdf

- Ensure that the territorial approach achieves “explicit but not exclusive targeting” (i.e. targeting everybody sharing similar socio-economic circumstances as the Roma) within the broader objective of fighting poverty and social exclusion.
- Adopt a territorial approach that takes into account both the regional and local situation and needs of the Roma in different locations and the global picture of the Roma in general - a ‘local-approach-global vision’.
- Include Roma ethnicity as an ethnic background in their national census in a non-discriminatory way. Despite the expectable under-reporting, this will provide an opportunity for Roma to become identifiable which in turn can give more insightful statistical data.
- Promote an ethical ethnic data collection which relies on anonymity and is used for statistical purposes only.
- Draw on existing demographic and statistical data as well as initiatives as models for action and frame for improvement.

1.2 Indicators for measuring Roma poverty

Indicators used to measure poverty matter in identifying the poor. ERIO believes that appropriate indicators have to be relevant for future policy initiatives in the field of poverty. As such, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Have few, clear and simple indicators to allow replication at EU level.
- Follow and respect the indicators proposed at the EU level in the EU 2020 Strategy (i.e. people living in households with very low work intensity, people at risk of poverty after social transfer, severely materially deprived people).
- Take a multiple disadvantage approach when setting up indicators by covering all aspects of Roma poverty and social exclusion, from income and work to health, housing and education.
- Include monetary indicators such as income, level of indebtedness and proportion of long-term unemployment.
- Include social indicators such as the level of poor health (e.g. low life expectancy) or educational disadvantage (e.g. early school leavers, low level of education, level of illiteracy and innumeracy), the number of people living in inadequate housing and poor environmental conditions, segregated without security and the extent to which people have inadequate access to public services.
- Include deprivation indicators such as adequate shoes, adequate clothing (e.g. not having second-hand clothes), adequate healthy diet and meal, adequate heating and the ability to participate in normal social, recreational and cultural activities. A difficulty with deprivation indicators, at European level, is the variability of what are considered basic necessities between countries which depend on the level of wealth.

2. General recommendations

2.1 Poverty and social exclusion

Roma suffer multiple forms of deprivation and exclusion. They are one of the most at risk of poverty group and the most hit by the financial crisis. ERIO welcomes the fact that one of the EU 2020 Strategy target aims to reduce by 25% the number of Europeans living below the poverty line. To break the poverty trap and tackle social exclusion of the Roma population, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Prioritise the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
- Ensure a minimum income which is above the poverty line. The current financial crisis should not be used as an excuse for not achieving these aims.
- Provide necessary financial resources to civil society and people experiencing poverty.
- Promote policies aiming to fight social exclusion and poverty faced by Roma.
- Make sure that National Reform Programmes will respect the priorities and targets established by the EU 2020.
- Create a national poverty and social exclusion strategy through National Actions Plans involving all relevant actors also at the regional and local level.
- Ensure that the most vulnerable groups have access to social rights.
- Link the Roma problems with the combat against poverty and not only to ethnic terms.

More specifically, ERIO calls on the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to:

- Do not limit the goal of the EU 2020 Strategy to only deficit reduction and economic growth, but make sure that it also aims for an inclusive economy.

2.2 Anti-discrimination

Poverty and social exclusion cannot be adequately reduced without also engaging with discrimination. Roma face discrimination in their access to rights, employment and services. Since the principle of anti-discrimination is one of the core values of the EU, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Ensure equal access and opportunities of Roma people to services by eradicating discriminatory obstacles in the fields of education, health, employment, housing and social service on grounds of racial or ethnic origin.
- Adopt non-discriminatory and constructive approaches when elaborating policies for fighting poverty.
- Adopt measures to protect Roma women who experience multiple discrimination (e.g. racial, sexual, class).
- Adopt a crosscutting horizontal approach to fight discrimination (e.g. gender, race, class, etc.) and to tackle multiple discrimination.

- Use EU legislation (e.g. non-discrimination Directives) for Roma inclusion in areas of social inclusion and anti-discrimination.
- Adopt the Horizontal Discrimination Directive able to tackle multiple discrimination and guarantee full equality in practice.
- Raise awareness of their equality national body and use it effectively and efficiently.

2.3 Policy

To increase the effectiveness of policies to fight poverty and social exclusion, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Ensure that all policies are built around the commitment to human rights values, stress the commitment of the EU on anti-discrimination and equality and aim to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, these strategies should promote such values like equal treatment and human rights.
- Include various stakeholders (i.e. NGOs, trade unions, businesses, local, regional and national authorities) and people living under poverty in the national policy-making processes.
- Create regional networks/working groups to coordinate policies and initiatives, exchange knowledge and disseminate good and innovative practices on fighting poverty and social exclusion.
- Ensure that policies carry greater weight upon social issues (e.g. education, culture, employment, etc).
- Ensure that local and regional authorities have the necessary tools and functioning structures to be able to effectively develop, implement and monitor social inclusion initiatives.
- Use peer reviews for learning about best practices at national and local level.
- Provide local and regional authorities with sufficient funds and resources to enable them to implement social policies aiming to fight poverty and social exclusion.

More specifically, ERIO calls on the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to:

- Make sure that the EU 2020 Strategy and EU approach to the financial crisis puts people first instead of competition between countries.

2.4 Funding

EU funding, particularly Structural Funds, are essential financial tools to support the aims of reducing poverty and social exclusion. To assure that funds are effectively used by member states in order to improve the integration of Roma communities and reduce social inequalities, ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Evaluate the contribution and impact of the EU funds on their fight to reduce poverty and social exclusion.
- Ensure funding reaches the areas where Roma live by providing a more efficient fund allocation.
- Use EU financial instruments for Roma inclusion (e.g. Structural Funds).
- Fund innovate pro-active projects.

More specifically, ERIO calls on the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to:

- Raise awareness within EU member states about EU structural funds and simplify its application process and access to facilitate and improve its use.

3. Specific recommendations

3.1 Education

There are serious barriers to access to education for Roma children. This is evident in their low enrolment rates. Overall, the educational enrolment among Roma is consistently low from pre-school to higher education, while segregated schooling persists. In addition, Roma children have a lower school performance compared to their non-Roma peers. ERIO believes that education is the key area for Roma to break out of the poverty cycle. To unlock Roma children from the continued exclusion and poverty in the future and to attain the EU 2020 target (i.e. reduce school drop-out rates below 10% and increase the number of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education to at least 40%), ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Simplify and increase the access of Roma children to education. Only if they go to school and increase their school performance will they have an opportunity to be lifted out of poverty.
- Increase access to pre-school education for Roma children by prioritising pre-school reading and writing skills in order to eliminate the discrepancy when they enter primary school. This will increase their success in primary education.
- Consider financial support for Roma families to assist them to deal with school costs (e.g. meals, uniforms, travel to school and books).
- Promote and invest in training during the transition from school to employment activity to boost the employability of Roma people.

3.2 Employment

The education status of Roma is closely linked to their employment outcomes. Roma's low educational attainment worsens their future chances in the labour market, while the need to increase household income keeps many Roma children out of school. The labour market status for Roma is significantly worse than for the general population. In Europe, significantly more Roma face consistently higher unemployment rates than non-Roma, particularly women. When

Roma are employed, it is mainly in casual, part-time, short-term or low-skilled jobs and many receive low salaries thus frequently remaining poor. To increase the employment status of the Roma and reach the EU 2020 target (i.e. increase the employment rate of the 20-64 year-olds to 75%), ERIO recommends to the European Commission and the Hungarian Presidency to call on EU member states to:

- Develop policies that combat in-work poverty and ensure employees have quality jobs which offer acceptable salaries and good working conditions and ensure an inclusive working atmosphere. This will provide an extra effort in combating poverty since the guarantee of employment is not the only way to achieve it.
- Adopt a wider approach in combating poverty through employment by not only reducing the unemployment rate but also by combating the increase in short-term contracts, temporary and forced part-time work.
- Invest in and reinforce the social and economic protection of those who are unable to work. Do not use the financial crisis as an excuse for not providing this investment.
- Take positive action in the field of education by providing vocational training and life-long learning in order to ensure an equal start for Roma and increase their chances of being integrated in the labour market.
- Encourage economic incentives for employers that hire Roma employees.
- Encourage micro-financing schemes for self-employment.
- Promote the inclusion of positive actions in human resources strategies (e.g. training courses, literacy classes and internships for Roma) as a way to promote the employability of Roma people.
- Promote the employment of Romani women into both public services and private sector.