



## **Recommendations of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) to the European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds**

European Structural Funds are important EU financial tools for the European Union member states to invest in order to improve the integration of Roma communities and reduce social inequalities. However, this can only be achieved when, and if, these funds are effectively used by member states. Unfortunately, member states are not currently effectively using and implementing to its maximum this funding opportunity. Therefore, ERIO would like to recommend a set of measures aiming to improve the use of Structural Funds for Roma social inclusion.

### **1. General recommendations**

#### **1.1 National Roma Integration Strategies**

ERIO believes that the best way to tackle Roma discrimination at the national level is to design and implement National Strategies (NS) for Roma. To design such NS, ERIO calls on all member states to:

- Ensure NS aim to attain full and effective equality between Roma and non-Roma as well as to contribute to the fight against racist discrimination and disrespect for human rights against Roma. This can be achieved by fully transposing and effectively implementing the EU equality legislation and policies at national level.
- Make sure that the priorities of NS include a small number of key issues, selected in a way to ensure a multidimensional effect on various and related issues. EU member states should ensure that the objectives of NS are related to the following priority areas: education, employment, non-discrimination and social inclusion
- Include the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion.
- Align NS with the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Promote gender sensitive policies and actions by addressing the specific needs of Roma women and involving them in the development of policies (i.e. implementation, monitoring and evaluation) or in activities relating to Roma communities.
- Ensure direct Roma participation and involvement in decision-making and at all stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation of NS.

## **1.2 EU Structural Funds**

ERIO calls on member states to:

- Make sure Structural Funds for Roma inclusion are effectively used and have a positive impact on the needs of Roma communities. Much too often, Structural Funds are being ineffectively used. For instance, in the field of education, where part of these funds go to, ‘special schools’ are being indirectly supported by Structural Funds. In Eastern and Central European countries, governments are using Structural Funds to reduce Roma early school leaving by bringing them back to ‘special schools’. ERIO strongly urges member states to close these special segregated schools since they are increasing illiteracy among Roma children due to the low quality education they provide and they contradict European values (i.e. human rights) due to their discriminatory nature. Another example where member states are also ineffectively using Structural Funds is in the field of employment when they create more employment agencies in order to reduce unemployment rates among the Roma. This is not enough since Roma people do not obtain jobs when they attend those agencies due to discrimination. In addition to these initiatives, member states should also ensure that Structural Funds cover all unemployed Roma communities in the same area.
- Make better use of EU Structural Funds for Roma social inclusion to support projects aiming at improving the lives of Roma people, promoting intercultural cohesion and challenging prejudices.
- Improve the capacity of administrative staff by providing resources and training to ensure that regional and local authorities have functioning structures able to operate with Structural Funds.
- Raise awareness about Structural Funds among Roma communities to ensure their accessibility to the Roma. This can be achieved by organising events such as campaigns, community meetings or concerts to inform Roma people about the possibilities of the funds. For these initiatives to be effective, member states have to find ways to overcome possible language barriers in communication with Roma people.
- Raise awareness about Structural Funds at the local level to ensure that local and regional authorities are well informed about funding possibilities.
- Promote intercultural information, training and activities to staff at local and regional administrations in order to develop their intercultural skills and learning and to promote a positive understanding of intercultural diversity. This should be complemented with a contextualised training about the current needs of Roma communities.
- Raise awareness about the benefits of inclusion among local and regional authorities. Investments in Roma inclusion are far cheaper than the costs of maintaining their current substandard socio-economic condition. For example, improving the employment rate of Roma can potentially grow the national GDP.

## **1.3 Social inclusion and non-discrimination**

ERIO calls on member states to:

- Take serious measures and adopt the EU 2020 Strategy and closely follow the conclusions and recommendations of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- Focus on and mainstream Roma issues because there is a large percentage of Roma living in extreme poverty.
- 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 policies 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.
- Adopt the Horizontal Directive to fight discrimination.
- Raise awareness and fully transpose the anti-discrimination and free movement Directives.

## **1.4 Policy making**

ERIO calls on member states to:

- Implement national action plans and include Roma in such plans.
- Adopt a general approach when creating policies by explicitly but not exclusively targeting the Roma (i.e. targeting everybody sharing similar socio-economic circumstances as the Roma).
- Assess if current policies and practices (i.e. in education, employment, housing and health care) have a negative impact on Roma communities.
- Use existing disaggregated data or collect new data in conformity with the rules on the protection of personal data. Incorporate and use data available to build policies. Ensure that demographic and statistical data (e.g. employment, health and housing) is used to more effectively determine the problems Roma face.

## **2. Specific recommendations**

### **2.1 Education**

Roma children are constantly facing barriers to access education which in many cases results in their exclusion from mainstream education. These children are either sent to ‘special schools’ specifically aimed for children with learning disabilities or they attend geographically segregated schools. In both cases, the curriculum tends to be below average resulting in these children getting an overall poor education. Education has a central role to play in improving the living conditions of the Roma. As such, ERIO strongly believes that there is an urgent need for member states to reduce barriers that keep Roma children away from school. To achieve this, ERIO calls on member states to:

- Stop the practice of placing Roma children in ‘special schools’ or ‘special classes’ for children with learning disabilities since such transfers are usually based on prejudices. Member states, especially from Eastern and Central Europe, should close these schools.

- Take adequate measures to integrate Roma children in the mainstream school system and guarantee their full inclusion. This should include the development and implementation of national action plans for the transfer of Roma children from ‘special schools’ and geographically segregated schools into mainstream schools.
- Involve capable members of Roma communities in the drafting process and implementation of school policies.
- Take positive action to eliminate the disadvantage of Roma children in education.
- Ensure pre-school education is available to all children, including the Roma. This level of education should help Roma children to learn the national language in order to give them an equal start in schooling.
- Develop a culturally sensitive national school curricula (from pre-school education) in order to address anti-Gypsyism and foster intercultural dialogue and understanding. Among other things, it should include the teaching of minority languages, cultures and histories which should be available to all schools.
- Challenge stereotypes by eliminating misrepresentations about Roma in school textbooks and including information on Roma cultural history and contributions.
- Develop clear and effective anti-racist policies for schools to address issues of racist abuse, harassment or violence based on ethnicity.
- Provide intercultural educational activities to raise awareness of intercultural understanding, diversity and dialogue (e.g. workshops, Roma festivals, cultural events) and to reduce prejudices, discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.
- Support regional and local authorities in their efforts to provide good quality education to Roma (e.g. mainstream education, reduce absenteeism and early school drop-outs, provide classroom assistants and instruction in their mother tongue, improve lack of basic skills).
- Ensure equal access and reduce barriers to education for all Roma children. This could be achieved by providing teachers with training about social inclusion, providing better transport for Roma children in rural areas and economic support for school material. Sanction abuse by school authorities who deny access to mainstream schools to Roma children based on ethnicity.

## **2.2 Employment**

Unemployment rates among the Roma are drastically superior to mainstream population. This is due to several factors. Low school enrolment, poor education levels and performance of Roma children along with discrimination are among some of the reasons keeping Roma out of the job market. In order to improve the employment situation of the Roma, ERIO calls on member states to:

- Take positive action in the field of education by providing vocational training and lifelong learning in order to ensure an equal start for Roma and increase their chances of being integrated in the labour market.
- Include positive actions in human resources strategies (e.g. training courses, internships for Roma) as a way to promote the employability of Roma people.
- Adopt national capacity programs for disadvantaged groups, including the Roma.
- Encourage micro-financing schemes for self-employment.

- Make better use of EU Structural Funds for Roma social inclusion to support projects aiming at improving the working lives of Roma people.
- Promote intercultural information, training and activities to staff in employment agencies in order to develop their intercultural skills and learning and to promote a positive understanding of intercultural diversity.

ERIO network would be pleased to further assist the Roma Social Inclusion Network with their future activities such as participating in campaigns that directly deal with Roma communities and awareness raising events carried out by member states.