



European Network Against Racism

Réseau européen contre le racisme

Progress made in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies

Comments of the European Network Against Racism on the
consultation of the European Commission

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The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) stands up against racism and discrimination and advocates for equality and solidarity for all in Europe. We connect local and national anti-racist NGOs throughout Europe and act as an interface between our member organisations and the European institutions. We voice the concerns of ethnic and religious minorities in European and national policy debates.

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Introduction

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the progress report of the European Commission in 2014. To answer to this consultation, the ENAR Secretariat has consulted ENAR Member Organisations working on the issue of Roma social inclusion and Anti-Gypsyism in the European Union. This report is the result and compilation of the responses we have received directly from our network during November 2013. We are deeply grateful to them for the time they put in sharing their expertise on the ground and contributing to ENAR's stance that the European Commission heighten pressure on the Member States to implement effectively the NRIS.

This is based on the consultation template provided by the European Commission. Nevertheless, respondents are not active in all areas of the NRIS and were unable to provide answers for all the areas, reflected in the report. The countries covered by the respondents are Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

This consultation and the dialogue taking place between now and the issuance of the report is an opportunity for highlighting essential elements in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), which are far from satisfactory. Dialogue with civil society and exchange of information must be a core mechanism for putting pressure on Member States to improve drastically the situation of Roma people in the EU.

Civil Society Participation

When it comes to mechanisms for civil society participation in the process of implementing the National Roma Integration Strategies, Member States have adopted different approaches, according to ENAR members. Some of them established mechanisms allowing civil society to participate, which is the case of Hungary, Slovakia, the UK and Spain. In these countries, several types of organisations have been involved in the implementation process, for example, Roma NGOs, pro-Roma NGOs, human rights NGOs, anti-racist NGOs, regional or local authorities, as well as equality bodies. On the other hand, in countries like Greece and Ireland, no mechanisms for civil society participation have been established. Furthermore, even in countries where there is such mechanism in the implementation process, this does not go beyond consultation; and only in Spain and Hungary have recommendations really been taken into account. In the case of the UK, government officials listen to the views of Roma civil society (Roma, Gypsy and Traveller organisations) on issues affecting them, but no direct action is taken afterwards. Meetings organised are consultative by nature rather than an opportunity for direct involvement by Roma civil society in any implementation of policies and decision-making. In Spain, the establishment of a National Council for the Roma and Gypsy as a consultative body under the administration of the public authorities enabled the participation of organisations of Roma civil society in the elaboration of its strategies.

Concerning the concrete influence of civil society on national strategy implementation in Spain, for example, even if the civil society is represented in national institutions, there is no direct and explicit participation of the civil society throughout the process. As for the UK, there were some interactions with government officials at an event hosted by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2013. But the response from officials was that Ministers have no real will to draft a Roma strategy, let alone have Roma civil society contribute to its implementation (the UK has a statement on its equality laws and examples of initiatives for Gypsies and Travellers rather than a strategy). When it comes to Slovakia, civil society has regular meetings with the municipality - mayors, parliamentarians, but also Roma - where the poor conditions of the Roma are highlighted and dialogue between the majority and the minority community members are attempted to be established in order to improve the situation in the country. An important goal is to give Roma the opportunity to have a genuine impact on changes in resolving their own situation. Roma communities themselves engage in active decision-making processes. According to ENAR members, even in countries where there is a NRIS, its implementation is sufficient and transparent enough, but not enough awareness is raised during the process, which is the case of Hungary, Slovakia and Greece. In other countries, like in Ireland, Spain and the UK, the implementation is not transparent enough or it isn't happening. ENAR members report that Roma involvement in the implementation phase was not seriously taken into consideration.

1. Policy Measures

1.1. Education

Steps taken since 2011

According to ENAR members' observations since 2011, Member States applied measures mainly to reduce early school leaving and, to a lesser extent, to improve early childhood education and care.

Both the Czech Republic and Bulgaria have introduced legislation to improve the participation of Roma children in education: the Bulgarian School Education Act 2012 provides expressly for the integration of Roma children and is based on three principles: equal access; preservation of ethno-cultural education and protection from discrimination.

The impact of measures

The impact of measures varies according to countries of respondents. Nevertheless, according to ENAR members, the impact of this is under average. According to Irish Travellers and Roma NGOs, the recession had a clearly negative impact on education

measures, provoking disproportioned cutbacks in Traveller education compared to financial cutbacks of other mainstream educational cuts. Mainstream measures sometimes have negative implications on Roma, for instance, the general funding cuts and some school enrolment policies in Ireland resulted in preference being given to students whose parent(s) attended the same school, clearly disadvantaging Roma and Travellers, whose parents had not been enrolled previously in these schools. In the Irish case, some recommendations could be addressed, for example, as regards standardised timeframes for applications to schools as well as enrolment policies in plain English. Another recommendation is the existence of an external appeals process, and where cases concern Travellers, the appeal body should have at least one Traveller representative as a member. Schools should no longer be allowed to operate the past pupil criterion in the allocation of school placements in any circumstances. In the Irish case, such negative implications could be minimised by a new bill, which is being discussed and is intended to promote equality in gaining access to and progression within the education system.

Plans for 2014-2020

According to a Roma NGO from Spain, the plans for the period 2014-2020 in the field of education policy, include policy reviews which are debatable and ideologically driven (privatisation of the public system, secularism, inclusion of catholic religion in the educational programme). For the global plan, the educational policy will focus on the legal revision of current policies. In Ireland, there is a Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2005) - but there are no timelines or plans for its implementation. There is no specific plan in relation to Roma education.

Brief description of one or two most relevant good practices in the area of education and their impact

In the UK, there are some positive examples in the school attainment of Roma pupils. In Ireland in some localised areas, education providers are implementing positive and inclusive programmes despite budget cuts, however, this is against the odds of there being no structural support and in some cases, there is actual opposition from official education bodies.

Brief description of one or two most relevant lessons learnt leading to policy review in the field of education

According to Spanish Roma NGOs, the education plan in Spain is elaborated and created according to the ideology of the current government. Another lesson learnt from the UK is that any segregation of Roma pupils, to catch up on language or literacy, must be kept to an absolute minimum.

1.2. Employment

Steps taken since 2011

There are no steps taken in the field of employment according to NGOs in Slovakia and the UK. The 2020 EU Strategy has overall and specific objectives for improving Roma's access to the labour market and increasing the employment rate and the percentile of Roma who work in salaried positions. But the reality is that these objectives are intangible and too ambitious and not translated on the ground.

Impact of measures

In Slovakia and the UK, there are no mainstream measures which are expected to contribute to closing the employment gap between Roma and non-Roma. In the UK, there are barriers to taking paid employment by Roma from Bulgaria and Romania. In Spain, considering that the government does not develop a national program for the decrease of illiteracy as is requested by the 2020 Strategy, there is no way to minimise the negative consequences of applied measures in this field. The government implemented policy measures that were developed to increase employment. However, the number of unemployed has increased to 26% of the active population. The question is how to create jobs for those who have never had formal jobs, like many of the Roma.

Plans for 2014-2020

According to Spanish NGOs, besides the EU 2020 Strategy, there is no national strategy that protects the Roma community. There is a lack of general policy in general, for education and there are gaps that prevent Roma from accessing education and professional training.

Brief description of one or two most relevant good practice(s) in the field of employment: What is its/their impact?

In the UK, the Big Issue Company supports some vendors selling the magazine with skills training. These people often go on to take established and sustainable jobs.

Brief description of one or two relevant lesson(s) learnt leading to policy review in the field of employment?

According to ENAR members in Spain, stakeholders should not repeat what has been done so far.

1.3. Healthcare

Steps taken since 2011

In Slovakia, preventive measures to ensure regular medical check-ups, prenatal and postnatal care and family planning were taken. In the UK, steps have been taken in order to ensure equal access to quality healthcare. In Spain, the basic social security coverage and comprehensive health services to Roma have been introduced.

Impact of measures

The impact of these measures can be qualified as good in England, Scotland and Wales and poor in Northern Ireland where most Roma have no access to basic healthcare. In Slovakia, such impact is considered rather poor. In the UK, the current policy debate about charging immigrants for healthcare is considered by local organisations as having negative implications on Roma. In Spain, the registration of the Roma community to the national health services has been undertaken by the government since 1982 and has shown good results. However, the 20-year difference of life expectancy between Roma and the Spanish mainstream is still a very big deficit. Even if some of the measures are not so impressive, there are some mainstream measures to reduce the rate of smoking, obesity, domestic accidents and dentist healthcare, starting already at an early age. What are missing are policies on preventive medicine and awareness raising campaigns for the promotion of individual family and social healthcare.

Give brief description of one or two most relevant good practice(s) in the field of healthcare? What is its/their impact?

In the UK, an e-learning package for healthcare workers on Roma and cultural issues has been developed.

1.4. Housing

Steps taken since 2011

In Spain, NGOs have welcomed the adoption of measures to eliminate spatial segregation and to promote desegregation in the field of housing.

In Slovakia members report that no steps have been taken since 2011.

Impact of measures

It was highlighted by organisations in Spain that the development of the so-called “sub-standards” (unacceptable housing conditions) on housing for Roma can have negative implications in this field.

1.5. Anti-discrimination

The six countries which took part in this consultation reported that anti-discrimination measures have not been taken, implemented nor mainstreamed by their respective governments, while they have witnessed increased discrimination and racist attacks against Roma.

Overall, anti-discrimination activists see the biggest challenge is the lack of political will of many Member States to invest in actions to curb racism, discrimination and related intolerance and to ensure equality and the protection of human rights for Roma residing in Europe.

The dimension of deeply-rooted anti-Gypsyism is largely overlooked by European and National policy makers and is one of the root-causes of the failure to bring about the necessary changes on the ground. The growing extremism against Roma and other groups in society as well as among authorities and media is deeply worrisome.

Steps taken since 2011

In November 2011, a national strategy against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related forms of intolerance was adopted in Spain. Specific sections of this strategy tackle the specific racism and discriminations affecting the Roma population.

Brief description of one or two most relevant good practice(s) in the area of anti-discrimination and its/their impact

In Spain, there is a Roma organisation which publishes every year an anthology containing all what has been published in the media negatively portraying the Roma population. The title is: « Newspapers against racism? Spanish press against the Roma population. »

Another Roma organisation has published compilations of humoristic comics against racism in seven languages, entitled « Europe is making fun of racism ». From these materials, hundreds of exhibitions have been organised in high schools, universities, cultural centres, public libraries, etc. reaching a public of around two million and a half young people. Nevertheless, all of this is insufficient if we don't include in curricula education to respect and live together with other cultures and ethnic groups.

Main recommendations regarding the implementation of the NRIS

At national level,

- One recommendation from our UK members is that the UK government should draft a strategy that has measurable targets that is devised and implemented with Roma civil society and local government authorities. The present statement has no targets and wasn't devised in consultation with Roma civil society. Only after it was submitted to the European Commission did the UK government consult others on issues impacting on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers.
- In Hungary, there is lack of financial support and central coordination for the NRIS. Slovakia members highlighted that the majority of the population still has prejudices against Roma, which are anchored in the past. It is necessary to build quality coexistence through which governmental policies may be implemented in practice.
- According to members in Ireland, Ireland is now under pressure to further improve the strategy as it has received such a bad assessment by the European Commission. As per above, the relevant department is saying that they are updating the strategy. However, this seems to all be happening behind closed doors and without the involvement of Travellers and Roma. One of the key requirements that the European Commission lay out in their guidance document for developing strategies is the need for active participation of Roma, Travellers and civil society. They also insist that strategies should adhere to the Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion, which emphasise participation of Roma and Travellers in all initiatives relating to them. The key concern is how the Strategy will be further developed without involvement of Travellers and Roma.

At EU level, ENAR recommends:

- The European Commission should scale up existing efforts to work with Member States, local authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organisations on awareness raising campaigns to dispel anti-Roma prejudice, and on initiatives that foster inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation and cultivate majority support for policies to promote Roma inclusion;
- Member States should review and support via funding the legislative and policy framework preventing segregation in education and immediately end the placement of Roma children in separate, low-quality schools;
- Member States should establish or strengthen data collection mechanisms on the socio-economic situation of Roma and the degree to which Roma experience discrimination on the ground of ethnic origin, while ensuring full

respect for data protection standards, including the anonymised processing of data and self-identification;

- Member States should make prevention of and the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance, and in particular racist violence, a core priority in all governmental programmes. They should also pay special attention to this issue in the National Roma Integration Strategies;
- Member States and the European Commission should ensure full implementation of the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC.