

Examples of promising practices of an effective use of EU funds for the benefit of Roma communities

ROMA ISG Subgroup on EU funding for Roma equality, inclusion and participation

1. Introduction

In February 2023, Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová and Commissioner Helena Dalli organised a series of hearings with Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to jointly identify possible obstacles, challenges and bottlenecks that need to be tackled in order to improve the living conditions of Roma communities and effectively promote Roma equality, inclusion and participation. The discussions identified the efficient use of EU funds as a crucial factor, underlining that, although significant EU funding is made available for promoting equality, inclusion and participation of Roma throughout the EU, the progress achieved so far still remains limited.

To address the issues raised by civil society during these hearings, a Subgroup on the use of EU funding was created within the Interservice Group on the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework (Roma ISG), bringing together colleagues from the Secretariat-General's Task Force on Equality Secretariat, DG JUST and all relevant DGs. By showcasing examples of promising practices the subgroup aims to further the mainstreaming of Roma matters into EU funding policies and promote a better use of EU funds in support of the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks and for the achievement of the EU Roma strategic framework's objectives and targets.

2. Main challenges

During the February 2023 hearings with Roma civil society organisations, as well as in subsequent discussions with national Roma contact points (NRCs), and during the 16th edition of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion (EPRI) held in Madrid in November 2023, the following challenges and obstacles were identified with regard to increasing the impact of EU funds for marginalised Roma communities:

Lack of capacity

- Insufficient capacity of regional, local authorities and Roma CSOs to access EU funds and implement EU funded projects.
- Lack of capacity building for Roma civil society. It also needs to be tailored to the specific needs of Roma and pro-Roma CSOs.
- Civil society organisations lack opportunities for access to technical assistance programmes and support.

Access barriers

- Smaller, grassroots CSOs do not sufficiently benefit from EU funds because of complex requirements for accessing EU funded programmes and administrative demands such as co-financing
- Social inclusion of Roma requires longer time than the usual timeframe provided by EU funded projects. These inclusion projects would need longer financial commitments.

Insufficient cooperation between different actors

- Local and regional authorities and National Roma Contact Points should be involved more closely in the EU funding programmes' design and implementation.
- Roma CSOs should actively participate in the design and coordination of programmes at all levels to ensure they address their real needs, including through participation in monitoring committees and in the design and implementation of local action plans.

Issues linked to data collection and monitoring

- The impact of EU funded programmes and projects on marginalised Roma communities should be measured through better data collection and monitoring.
- The enforcement of the EU funding regulations (e.g. ESF+, ERDF, RRF) with regard to the anti-discrimination and desegregation conditionality does not appear to be sufficiently monitored and ensured, both at national and local levels, linked to a weak engagement of municipalities in desegregation efforts.

Lack of coherence between policies and funds

- EU funding instruments and programmes should be aligned with the national Roma strategic frameworks and related policy measures in a clear and transparent manner, and ensure they are coherent and complement each other on their investments supporting the common policy goals and Roma equality and inclusion.

Antigypsyism, discrimination and intersectionality

- An anti-discrimination and non-segregation conditionality should be introduced at all levels, including the local level.
- Fighting antigypsyism should be addressed as a horizontal priority across sectoral areas in order to ensure effective and equal access of Roma to policies and services
- To tackle the challenges faced by different groups and reflect the diversity within the Roma population, an integrated and intersectional approach is needed.

3. Possible avenues

The subgroup conducted a stock-taking exercise of existing projects, practices and initiatives that include successful or promising elements addressing the challenges above which may have a potential for replication or upscaling. It should be noted that several of these challenges are interconnected (e.g. antigypsyism leading to reluctance of local authorities to cooperate closely with Roma CSOs, or lack of capacity of smaller organisations exacerbating access barriers to EU-funded programmes); moreover, most of the concrete project examples combine a range of actions addressing different needs and challenges.

Challenge	Possible avenues	Project examples
Lack of capacity	Building capacity of local authorities to develop and implement plans and projects for Roma inclusion.	ROMACT Contact: romact@coe.int , +33 (0)3 88 41 20 00
	Fostering sharing of knowledge and building capacity of managing authorities on improving the use of cohesion funds for Roma equality and inclusion.	EURoma Network Contact: info@euromanet.eu , +34 91 422 09 68
	Supporting civil society working with marginalised communities through professional training and exchange of good practices.	ESF+ Education and Employment Programme Contact: https://www.eufunds.bg/bg
	Building capacity of Roma CSOs.	Roma Civil Monitoring Contact: info@romacivilmonitoring.eu
	Building capacity of beneficiaries, applicants and their partners in preparing project proposals, management of EU resources and implementation.	ESF+ Programmes for Bulgaria Contact: https://www.eufunds.bg/bg
	Building capacity of Roma beneficiaries in management of personal finances and housing	HERO-Housing and Empowerment for Roma Contact: L&D-GO@coebank.org
Access barriers	Small grants without co-financing requirements.	LEADER/CLLD Contact: info@enrd.eu , +32 2 801 38 00
	Supporting national, regional and local authorities to identify and address bottlenecks in implementation of EU funded projects (not only) towards social inclusion of Roma.	Slovakia: Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) Contact: REGIO-SLOVAKIA@ec.europa.eu
Insufficient cooperation	Active involvement of Roma and other marginalised communities in the development and implementation of local action plans and projects.	ROMACT Contact: romact@coe.int , +33 (0)3 88 41 20 00 Rehousing programme for marginalised people living in settlements in the regions of Madrid ACCEDER Contact: fsq@gitanos.org , +34 91 422 09 60 HERO-Housing and Empowerment for Roma Contact: L&D-GO@coebank.org

Challenge	Possible avenues	Project examples
	Fostering cooperation and building trust among relevant stakeholders.	Slovakia: Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) Contact: REGIO-SLOVAKIA@ec.europa.eu
	Fostering sharing of knowledge and building capacity of ESF+ and ERDF managing authorities and National Roma Contact Points on an increased and more effective use of Cohesion Policy Funds (notably ESF+ and ERDF) to promote the social inclusion, equal opportunities and fight against discrimination of the Roma.	EURoma Network Contact: info@euromanet.eu , +34 91 422 09 68
	Supporting the creation, strategy development and operation of urban Local Action Groups (LAGs) as well as cooperation between these groups.	ESF+ Social inclusion and Dignity Programme Contact: dcei@mfe.gov.ro
	Cooperation with relevant actors (landlords, employers etc.).	Housing First Contact: info@romodrom.cz , +420 226 521 495 ACCEDER Contact: fsg@gitanos.org , +34 91 422 09 60
Coherence between policies and funds	Strengthening dialogue between EU funds managing authorities and National Roma Contact Points to promote alignment of EU funded projects with policy goals.	EURoma Network Contact: info@euromanet.eu , +34 91 422 09 68
Antigypsyism, discrimination and intersectionality	Strengthening regional governance in view of a better enforcement.	Technical Support Instrument Strengthening the management of the Romanian education system Contact: REFORM-TSI@ec.europa.eu
	Actions targeting specific groups such as Roma women or youth within a broader intersectional perspective.	Promociona Programme Contact: fsg@gitanos.org , +34 91 422 09 60 Cali Equality for Roma Women Contact: fsg@gitanos.org , +34 91 422 09 60
	Actions targeting access to housing of multiply disadvantaged Roma (e.g. suffering from addiction, mental illness, etc.).	Housing First Contact: info@romodrom.cz , +420 226 521 495

For more information about the examples of promising practices please see the annex.

4. Moving forward

The Commission is promoting the promising practices identified in this compilation towards all relevant actors, including in particular National Roma Contact Points, EU funds managing authorities, and intermediary bodies. While DG JUST will reach out to the National Roma Contact Points, the

funding DGs – REGIO, EMPL, AGRI, RECOVER – and in particular their geographical desks have a crucial role to play in raising awareness about persisting challenges and promising avenues among managing authorities and intermediary bodies.

The success elements recognised by the project implementers include mainly the following:

- Capacity building and empowerment of local authorities, Roma CSOs individuals and whole communities.
- Active involvement of all relevant actors, particularly local authorities, Roma CSOs, but also employers, private landlords, healthcare providers and whole communities.
- Building positive relationships among Roma and non-Roma residents.
- Long-term sustainable integrated approaches tailored to specific needs of beneficiaries.
- Capitalising on experience and lessons learned.

In preparing the next MFF programming period, the Commission will reflect on the lessons learnt from the implementation of the current cohesion policy funds and explore ways to overcome the identified bottlenecks.

To ensure continuous engagement and buy-in of Member States, the Commission will keep the issue of improving the impact of EU funding for Roma on the agenda of high-level meetings and events, in particular the annual European Platform for Roma Inclusion, as well as the regular meetings of the NRCP network.

Moreover, the examples quoted above underscore the pivotal role played by the EURoma Network with regard to improving the use of EU funds for the benefit of Roma communities. By addressing capacity, cooperation and coherence between funds and policies, the EURoma Network aims to tackle some of the challenges identified in the hearings with Roma and pro-Roma NGOs and in the subsequent work of the subgroup. It promotes a broad geographical coverage by bringing together public authorities in charge of the management of EU Funds (notably ESF+ and ERDF) and National Roma Contact Points from 15 Member States, including those with the largest Roma populations (Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain). It should therefore be considered this work to be strengthened.
