

The 10th meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion took place in Brussels on 29-30 November 2016. The objective of the Platform was to bring together all stakeholders involved in the Roma integration process from European, national and regional/local levels (with a view to securing a political recommitment to the goal of Roma integration in the context of the midterm review of the EU Framework. The Platform aimed to provide an opportunity to all stakeholders for stocktaking on where we are 5 years after the launch of EU Framework, the key achievements to be built on, and the weaknesses to be addressed.

The thematic focus of the Platform – **mutual accountability of all stakeholders** – has been defined after a broad consultation with European civil society and the network of National Roma Contact Points (NRCP) in addition to an online survey (a total of 134 inputs were received).

The **political opening** included interventions the European Commission, the current EU SK Presidency as well as from the Council of Europe and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

- Deputy Director General of Directorate General Regional Development, Mr Normunds Popens emphasised social fairness, the use of European Structural and Investment Funds for Roma inclusion and the importance of partnership. He underlined that we are at point to achieve something: The (policy, legal and financial) system is designed; funding is in place, change should now happen on the ground.
- Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities, Mr Abel Ravasz presented the key priorities and achievements of the EU Slovak Presidency in the area of Roma integration: the Council Conclusions responding to the Court of Auditors June 2016 report on the use of EU funds for Roma, the draft of the Council Conclusions on accelerating process of Roma integration to be adopted by EPSCO on 8 December and the High level event on Roma youth empowerment co-financed and co-organised together with the European Commission. His key message referred to the need to combat populism and nationalism challenging EU core values and to ensure that Roma and migrants are not put in competition for resources.
- Special representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma issues, Mr Valeriu Nicolae referred to important progress made in the past years: recognition of antiGypsyism at highest level ever, more Roma than before in decision-making positions, more money allocated to Roma integration than ever before. In terms of further priorities to be addressed he underlined the need to coordinate better among international organisations and to support more civil society capacity building.
- EU FRA Director, Mr Michael O'Flaherty presented the first results of the 2016 EUMIDISII survey on Roma (see report: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>, see presentation attached) and made the following conclusions and recommendations: 1. Implement the policies we have, 2. It is about fundamental rights. 3. Data needed to stand up for rights. 4. Human rights community to more get engaged. 5. Support Roma (women) empowerment, 6. Tackle poverty, 7. End (de facto) segregation, 8. End racism.

After the political opening, the two political panels focused on **mutual accountability regarding effectiveness of policies and funding as well as Roma participation (with focus on youth, women and children) took place**. The interventions by speakers (government representatives of HU, EL, RO and BG, members of the European Parliament, the European Commission, Roma civil society and local authorities) addressed the main achievements and bottlenecks in making progress, with each stakeholder asked to reflect on their own role in advancing Roma integration and fighting discrimination and antiGypsyism. The discussions covered the following main themes:

- The concept of mutual accountability and the relationship between power/competences of various actors on the one hand and their responsibilities and accountability on the other. (Ones with greater influence have greater responsibility.) Although there might be power differentials between different actors, it should not shift away the responsibility of other actors or undermine the importance of **cooperation and partnership between different actors, recognising their respective specific roles** in the process.

- The **shrinking space of civil society**, affecting Roma civil society and its capacity to hold governments and EU institutions accountable. The need for independence of NGOs from donors.
- The concept of **antigypsyism**, which is recognised most at European level, and not enough at national and local levels. The linkages between fighting antigypsyism and social inclusion (tackling inequalities in education, employment, healthcare and housing). The idea of setting up truth and reconciliation committees at European and national levels.
- The importance of **more active Roma participation in politics**, to become part of the political process, as well as participate in monitoring impact of policies and funds. Ownership of Roma integration at all level as a precondition of good use of funds.
- Roma integration in the context of the **migration and refugee crisis**, including the need for solidarity, and the need to ensure there is no competition between different vulnerable groups for funding, the need for a change in narrative to effectively fight growing nationalism and extremism.
- The need to **assess progress and failures of the EU Framework** and NRIS, to further improve transborder communication on good practices, and improve linkages between local, national and European processes. To move to mutually implemented solutions. The need to improve transparency of reporting has also been underlined. The importance of recognising that it takes time to make change, see impacts of structures built and processes launched.

In the second day of the platform **interactive participatory discussions** were held among the different stakeholders regarding their own contributions to the Platform, to the improvement to the life of Roma, and the areas in which cooperating actors could make most impact. Achievements, weaknesses, necessary improvement up to 2020, vision beyond 2020 and questions of cooperation were discussed and explored.

In the **closing plenary** civil society rapporteurs summarised the conclusions of the discussions regarding achievements so far and priorities for the future

All stakeholders agreed that a lot has been accomplished since the adoption of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. The integration of Roma has been put high on both, EU and Member States' agendas. There is more funding allocated to support Roma integration measures than ever before. There is also an improvement in enforcing the EU law (3 infringement proceedings were launched). There are governmental bodies following the Roma integration in Member States (National Roma Contact Points). There is also progress in improving the dialogue among all stakeholders (launch of Roma National Platforms). There are several programmes devoted to Roma integration. Local authorities managed to develop their local development strategies and also to access better to EU funding. The local authorities also managed to support Roma integration measures from their local budget. There are also steps taken in respect of improving the education of Roma children. More visibility is given to Roma youth and role and protection of Roma women. It was however concluded that despite all these achievements the situation of Roma on the ground remains unchanged. More efforts at all levels are still needed. As it was highlighted, there is still need for better coordination (among all stakeholders), transparency in respect of funding and policies, data collection, impact monitoring and efficient use of funding. The NGOs' stakeholders called on their greater involvement in the consultation, implementation and monitoring (at EU, national, regional levels). They also expressed the need to improve the European Platform; they called on their better involvement in the organisation and participation in the Platform. They also asked for better continuity between the Platforms. Importance of Roma communities involvement in Roma programmes, projects as well as the necessity of integrated and long term policies were also mentioned.

Some stakeholders also expressed the concerns related to the increase of populism, antiGypsyism and discrimination as well as to refugee crises overshadowing the process of Roma integration.

The need to change mindsets and address the worsening atmosphere in Europe was also highlighted by **Commissioner Věra Jourová** in her closing speech. She underlined the strong commitment of the Commission, the importance of good country specific recommendations to ensure that funds (also through better targeting) go to proper places and bring results. The Commission can support efforts and promote change by monitoring, coordination, facilitation of exchange of best practices, Country Specific Recommendations, infringements. Commissioner Jourová emphasised the importance of investing in the quality inclusive education of Roma children, in the empowerment of Roma youth and their involvement in politics, better communication and cooperation with civil society. She sent a strong

message on the need to fight discrimination, racism, hate speech and hate crime by all means. The importance of cooperation to restore faith in the European project was at the centre of the closing statement made by deputy permanent representative Neil Kerr on behalf of the forthcoming Maltese Presidency.