



Report from the 8th meeting of the European platform for Roma inclusion:

It is urgent to make change for Roma children and youth

Brussels, June 27, 2013

Context

The European Platform for Roma inclusion (or European Roma Platform) was created in 2009 to support policy developments for Roma integration and stimulate exchanges and coordination among Member States, international organisations and Roma civil society. The European Platform for Roma inclusion is an important forum for concerted actions of all relevant stakeholders at European, national and local levels for the integration of Roma people in Europe. It also contributes to making both European and national policies more sensitive to Roma needs.

The 8th European Platform for Roma Inclusion addressed the urgent need to make change for Roma children and youth. Many Roma people in Europe, including a high number of children and young people, live in very poor socio-economic conditions and face discrimination and social exclusion in their daily lives. The meeting intended to explore the urgent need and possible solutions for advancing the integration of Roma children and youth, who are particularly vulnerable within the Roma communities.

Four successive panel discussions were held focusing on:

1. Making change for Roma children from birth to compulsory school age (focus on health, early childhood education and care, and compulsory education);
2. Making change for Roma youth (focus on the transition between school and employment);
3. Roma empowerment: how Roma leaders can drive change (focus on hearing the voice of Roma youth);
4. Following progress on the ground – shaping policies that work (focus on monitoring the strategies).

Participants included representatives from the Member States (national Roma contact points) and enlargement countries, international organisations, civil society, local and regional authorities from all over Europe¹ and academics.

¹ Representatives from a local and regional authorities and civil society were invited from all 27 EU Member States.

Political opening

The meeting was opened by European Commission Director General of DG Justice, Françoise Le Bail. After a short video clip made by a Slovak newspaper (), she underlined the adoption by the Commission, on the day before the Platform's meeting, of the Communication on "Steps forward in implementing national Roma integration strategies" COM(2013)454 and Proposal for a Council Recommendation "on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States" COM(2013)460. Director General Le Bail acknowledged that efforts are being made by Member States, international and civil society organisations, and that these stakeholders are facing difficulties. However, she insisted that making change for Roma children cannot wait.

Representative from the Irish presidency of the EU Catriona Hanevy (Department of Education and Skills) highlighted the particular importance of education for Roma and travellers' children and youth, as a levy to break the vicious circle of social exclusion.

I. Panel 1 – Making change for Roma children from birth to compulsory school age

European Commission Deputy Director General of Education and Culture Xavier Prats-Monne highlighted the challenges faced by Roma children and youth in education, illustrated by the completion rates of Roma children and youth at school, insisting not only on primary school, but also on the need to ensure a smooth and effective transition to secondary education, and further on, to tertiary education. Deputy Director General Prats Monne acknowledged 3 main challenges at the core of the dramatic situation faced by Roma children and youth: high discrimination, high social and economic exclusion and high rates of early school leaving. He insisted on the need to have Roma integration mainstreamed in overall policies, in order to tackle these challenges effectively.

Panellists insisted upon various aspects that need to be taken into account when addressing the situation of Roma children and youth from birth to compulsory school age:

- the need to involve Roma families as key actors in the education of their children and the need to train school professionals and provide them with adequate skills (project "Roma families get involved" and handbook)
- the need to develop a holistic approach around the needs of Roma children, combining attention to maternal and infants' health, early learning, community and family support, as well as early childhood intervention and attention to special needs, an approach put into practice by the multifunctional centres in Romania (UNICEF and the Step by Step centre for educational and professional development in Romania)
- the fact that positive examples exist of inclusion and equality of Roma pupils in mainstream schools where innovative and dynamic approaches are followed, with the example of a Slovak school where half of the pupils are Roma and half are non-Roma (hands-on example from a Slovak school Director and a Roma pupil from the school)
- the need to tackle health inequalities and find solutions to ensure funding of proactive Roma inclusion projects and strategies (World Health Organisation)

II. Panel 2 – Making change for Roma youth

European Commissioner Andor referred to the attention paid in the Europe 2020 process to the need to fight early school leaving, strengthen the inclusiveness of public education and promote Roma participation in all stages of education. He underlined that a dynamic social

investment approach focusing on supporting and empowering individuals through different stages in their life and tackling disadvantage as early as possible, is central to the Social Investment Package adopted by the Commission in February. He mentioned in particular the Recommendation "Investing in children – breaking the cycle of disadvantage", that highlights the need to **support parents' access to the labour market**, and provide children and families with **adequate income support**. It also puts a strong focus on **empowering children** through services that play an essential role in their development and future outcomes.

Panellists insisted upon various aspects that need to be taken into account when addressing the situation of Roma youth and their transition from school to employment:

- the need to combat school segregation and detrimental social measures e.g. only giving access to the canteen to children whose both parents are working (creating segregation when in most Roma families at least one parent is unemployed)
- the need to support contacts between Roma migrants and local institutions from the host countries while at the same time supporting Roma attending schools and providing them with vocational training and adapted schemes (Le Foyer asbl)
- the need to act both on the educational level of the family and on the pupil's social interactions with other actors, two factors affecting the education performances of children and youth (EduRom project).
- the need to build bridges between the Roma and the majority society (TuRom project)
- the need to develop a needs-oriented approach but also to include all actors, including employers, and to secure funding supporting employment policies (José Manuel Fresno)

III. Panel 3 - Roma empowerment: how Roma leaders can drive change

This panel aimed at making the voice of Roma youth heard. Panellists (from TernYpe, FERYP and Impreuna) insisted upon various aspects that need to be taken into account when addressing Roma youth's empowerment:

- the need to support dialogue between Roma and non-Roma youth, but also from Roma coming from various places in Europe, living in very different contexts
- the need to make Roma youth feel respected and to take their views into account in the decision making processes
- the need to support Roma youth's self-esteem, in particular by highlighting role models (also a way to break stereotypes from the mainstream society)

IV. Panel 4 – Following progress on the ground

European Commission Vice President and Commissioner for Justice, Citizenship and Fundamental Rights Viviane Reding, expressed her satisfaction to receive information and feed-backs from the people working to improve the situation of the Roma on the ground. She presented the Commission's report on Steps forward in implementing national Roma integration strategies COM(2013)454, highlighting that although good action is noticeable in some Member States, a lot of them did not put in practice yet what was written in their strategies. She indicated that the Commission made one step further by its proposal for a Council Recommendation, i.e. a proposal for the Council to legislate in that matter. She then referred to a number of specific aspects dealt with in both COM(2013)454 and COM(2013)460 such as the importance to ensure monitoring of the strategies; to offer

technical assistance to local actors so as to support their access to EU funds for Roma integration; to bring the use of EU funds in coherence with the national funding spent for Roma integration; to strengthen the National Roma Contact Points; to apply the Race equality Directive in practice; to disseminate information to Roma people on what exists at national level to protect their rights; disseminate information on their rights and obligations. She summarised by saying that Roma integration is a "joint venture" between the EU – pushing for progress, providing EU money and developing EU law – and the other actors (in particular at national and local level, but also the media).

Panellists insisted upon various aspects related to following progress on the ground and shaping policies that work:

- the main results from monitoring systems put in place and followed-up by civil society are in line with the findings from the European Commission (Decade for Roma inclusion)
- there are solutions to collect data and monitor progress within the Member States (FRA working group on monitoring set up with 10 Member States)
- national Roma integration strategies are adapted and implementation is moving forward in Member States (examples from Hungary and Romania)
- discrimination of Roma is an on-going and persisting challenge for the Member States to tackle; a particular attention should be paid to children and youth (European Roma Rights Centre)