

The fight against antigypsyism needs more force

The 2020 EU Roma Strategic Framework represents a necessary new beginning in the fight against antigypsyism in Europe. But it remains a toothless tiger without an equality law for Romani people, writes **Romeo Franz**



Romeo Franz (DE, Greens/EFA) is Parliament's rapporteur on the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

I am a Romani man, a Sinto, and the son of a Holocaust survivor. I know what suffering feels like, and my wish is that nobody will ever have to endure what my family and I had to endure during the darkest times of our history – I lost six aunts and uncles during the Holocaust – or the cruel antigypsyism we experience on a daily basis.

I am the first ever Sinto from Germany to be elected to the European Parliament, and I have never forgotten my people. They are the core of my activity. I always knew that change could only come by law, and in 2020 I started working on a resolution calling for such a change. With the help of a great team and dedicated colleagues, we managed to write history on 17 September-

ber 2020, when 545 MEPs adopted the resolution calling for a law for Romani people. Immediately afterwards I was expecting the Commission to draft legislation, but instead they came up with a new Strategic Romani Framework.

The new EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation is a strengthened and more comprehensive version compared to the previous framework. This version puts more pressure on Member States to close the gap between Romani people and majority populations. It also combines socioeconomic aspects with a rights-based approach and puts the fight against antigypsyism at the forefront.

The new policy came at the right time,

as we could see how bad the situation was for many Romani people during the pandemic. Covid-19 did not care about ethnicity. It was affecting everyone, without taking into account the colour of a person's skin, but it was also hitting vulnerable populations hard, especially Romani people who didn't have food, drinking water or sanitary conditions to stay safe from the virus.

I am glad to see that the new elements of the 2020 EU Roma Strategic Framework largely reflect the claims made in the resolution that I developed. It represents a necessary new beginning in the fight against anti-gypsyism and for the equal participation of Romani people in Europe.

Even if this is clear progress, however, the strategy lacks commitment and control.

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we improve the precarious situation of millions of Romani people in Europe when political leaders in the affected countries are themselves openly antigypsyist and EU funds are redirected for the stigmatisation of Romani communities

instead of contributing to inclusion and the fight against racism?

How can we achieve fair participation for Romani people in a state system in which the principles of the rule of law are disregarded and equal access to justice is not guaranteed for all citizens?

Without a greater commitment, little will change for Romani people. I am very glad that we currently have a large majority in the European Parliament that is in favour of a European equality law for Romani people and a rule of law mechanism that ensures respect for fundamental rights as a precondition for Member States to gain access to EU funding.

Only with legislative action will Romani people be able to exercise their rights as equal citizens and will we be able to ensure that our financial support gets to where it is urgently needed.

The EU has the power to make a law for Romani people possible, and the European Parliament already took the first step. Next, in 2022, the EU Commission must propose legislation to the Parliament and the Council to make sure Romani people will be treated as equal citizens. I committed to continue this work until the law becomes a reality. ★