



## Political Leadership for Roma Inclusion

### Open-Editorial

The Roma issue has ever increasing relevance in the European and the Member States' political agendas. The expansion of the Union towards Eastern Europe has brought new challenges and opportunities, in addition to a growing institutional interest to reduce inequality between European Roma and non-Roma, accelerate Roma social inclusion and facilitate their political empowerment. Initiatives such as the Decade for the Inclusion of Roma People, The Roma Education Fund, OSI's Roma Initiative, and the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* have shown that substantial progress is possible where the political will exists to work collaboratively with the Roma for their full social, political and economic integration. Also, much more efforts are needed to communicate to the non-Roma majority that achieving these goals, benefits us all.

### ***Roma in Europe***

The incorporation of countries from Central and Eastern Europe to the EU has not implied the full incorporation of their Roma population as full citizens of the Union. Many have experienced years of stagnation and regressive action. Not facing Roma poverty, exclusion, discrimination and social renunciation will put in jeopardy the ten million Roma living in Europe and the process of European construction itself.

Recent racist attacks in several countries have highlighted the gravity of the situation that Roma currently experience, as well as the inadequacy of some policies put in place until now. This is not a Roma problem, rather a societal problem that questions our ability to confront the Roma issue. The very Fundamental rights sanctioned in European treaties—especially equality and social cohesion—are being put to the test.

The European Parliament, Council and Commission are paying more and more attention to inclusion policies. The First European Roman Summit in 2008 raised the challenges that the Second Summit in Cordoba addressed in 2010, this time producing actual commitments protecting Roma minorities from discrimination.

There is a general acknowledgement of the need to drive European policies in favour of Roma inclusion. European institutions are already changing their rhetoric. It remains to be seen whether or not the leadership of EU Member States and EU institutions have the political will to invest political capital in advocating for the inclusion of a stigmatized and systematically discriminated against minority.

It is necessary to guarantee that Roma people enjoy the same fundamental rights assisting us all and to guarantee effective access to their social and political rights. Together, we ought to design measures that impact on equality of opportunity for Roma, their economic participation, decision-making, health care, education and access to decent housing and non-segregated neighbourhoods. Roma people themselves will be key in consolidating the already initiated path for change to ensure the full social inclusion of Roma women.

### ***A Model for Inclusion?***

EU Member States agreed in June, 2009 on the ten principles which shall govern Roma integration policies. The second principle – “explicit, but not exclusive targeting”—seems to advocate for the so-called *Spanish model*.

The *Spanish model* refers to the specific form of social protection which has had a positive impact on the social situation of Roma. The *model* takes a pragmatic approach that prioritizes measures which compensate for unequal access to social rights, while not getting mired in the defence of civil rights and political participation—questions that have only been attended to in the last five years.

The fundamental pillar of this approach is based on the universal and inclusive nature of social assistance. In some subjects —such as housing—the system has benefited Roma families, not on the basis of their Roma condition, but on the basis of their disadvantaged-citizens condition. This form of social assistance contributes to inclusion, but this is not enough in itself.

The model's other pillar is founded on the implementation of measures specifically directed at the Roma community in order to correct the inequality of opportunities. Policy responses have been adapted to Roma needs in education, housing, access to employment, and health care. The objective of these measures is to normalize and not segregate.

### ***Conclusions: Goals and Lines of Action***

The following objectives should be the focus of our efforts and resources that ensure tangible change in the medium term and design policies and practices in favour of Roma inclusion:

- **Increasing the rate of young Roma who finish mandatory secondary education should be a priority for public administrations and Roma families.** Education is a necessary condition for social cohesion; and simultaneously improves the personal economic situation of individuals while also contributing to state revenue.
- **Increasing the presence of Roma people in the labour market, particularly, in remunerated jobs.** Employment is the best form of inclusion. An active participation in the economy generates feelings of belonging and allows for the overcoming of stereotypes.
- **Combating discrimination,** redirecting Roma social image and promoting social recognition of Roma culture. It is key to work with media to eliminate stigmatizing images and stereotypes.
- **Creating common spaces of cohabitation** which translate into more and better opportunities, definitively eradicating shantytowns, segregated zones and slums.

These goals must define the axis for action in the EU and Member States, employing European political instruments already in existence:

- **Inclusion Policy:** Placing the Roma community at the centre of the European Strategy for Inclusion and in the Open Method of Coordination, providing states with directives, objectives, goals and indicators against which they can mark their progress.
- **Anti-discrimination policy:** Closely observing the application of European and Member State regulations.

- **Structural Funds:** Making them the main European instrument for policies against exclusion, financing projects and prioritizing these measures in the design of each State's Operational Programmes.

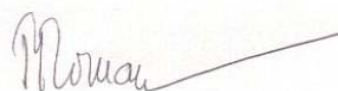
Various European Commissioners and Directorate Generals in the European Commission have been charged with responsibilities directly related to Roma integration. Each of these entities, from their respective competencies, has the potential to contribute much to the guarantee of the effective exercise of rights that Roma citizens enjoy. In addition to this, it would be even more optimal to create a structural coordination of European policies in favour of Roma inclusion, locating the responsibility for Roma integration policies in a single entity tasked with the inclusion of the largest, most extensive and gravely discriminated minority in Europe.



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