



CITIES AND ROMA INCLUSION

EUROCITIES statement on the local dimension of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies

European cities are the main settings for Roma inclusion to take place - or to fail. Intra-European mobility has put the topic of Roma inclusion back on the political agenda and highlighted that Roma inclusion concerns Europe as a whole. We believe that the next few years will be decisive for making a positive change.

The new EU framework is an opportunity to strengthen political commitment and coordination at all levels of government, together with civil society and Roma organisations. It should also stimulate better support from the national and EU level in terms of funding and capacity building for measures contributing to the local inclusion of Roma.

As European cities, we are conscious of our responsibility to protect the rights of our most vulnerable residents, including ethnic minorities, and are engaged in ensuring that local institutions better represent cities' diversity. We are equally committed to European citizenship and the free mobility of EU citizens. It is crucial that all cities and regions in Europe offer a decent life to all citizens, by providing non-discriminatory access to housing and social services such as education, health services, training opportunities, employment and support for self-employment. This requires that not only the EU framework for Roma inclusion, but also the framework on anti-discrimination becomes effective Europe-wide and reaches the local level. It also requires close cooperation with Roma and civil society organisations at all levels and full participatory rights for Roma as a national ethnic minority or as a migrant or travellers community.

While the European Commission and EU member states share the main responsibility for providing the legal framework for Roma inclusion, cities are ready to get involved with our commitment and experience in making this framework a reality.

The new EU framework for Roma Integration and the future EU budget

The new EU framework for national Roma integration and the Europe 2020 strategy provide an opportunity to tackle social exclusion of Roma in Europe. They acknowledge that investing in the most vulnerable people is crucial for achieving an inclusive, smart and green Europe. Being closest to the people, cities know that an investment in social inclusion leads to benefits for the whole society.

We believe that the national Roma strategies will be meaningless without the full involvement of cities and other local stakeholders. The targets of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies and those of Europe 2020 will not be met without a strong local involvement of cities starting from the design of national strategies and action plans. We also stress that the 2009 Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion should be a guideline for the national action plans on Roma inclusion.

As to EU structural funds, we support the European Commission's assessment that bottlenecks at all levels are currently hindering the effectiveness of these funds. In many EU member states, access for cities that are committed to combating social exclusion to funds and to technical assistance is limited. A further problem is that it is difficult to address the complexity and urgency of social problems appropriately through structural funds. EU structural funds need to become more effective both in integrating different policy areas and in reaching down to the local level. On the other hand, the recent amendment to the ERDF regulation, which allows financing housing for vulnerable groups in the context of an integrated approach and the current position of the European Commission on the future of cohesion policy are steps in the right direction.

We believe that in the new programming period of EU funds, better support for the inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups can be achieved by:

- encouraging integrated approaches to social inclusion, including area-based approaches;
- allowing for experimentation and social innovation as well as for mutual learning of approaches that have been proven to be successful and effective;
- allowing programmes to be managed at the more appropriate level of governance (flexible geographies), including the micro-level, as strong disparities often exist at relatively small geographical levels, i.e. between neighbourhoods; and
- involving cities at every stage of the process, from national planning to the delivery of cohesion policy.

Local effects of EU mobility on social policies

EU policies often perceive EU mobility as driven by economic opportunities. Local experience shows that intra-EU mobility also includes particularly vulnerable people that decide to move because of inappropriate living and working conditions in their home country. This puts pressure on local welfare systems and on social cohesion, and can drive down social and labour standards.

We believe that no EU citizen should have to migrate to avoid discrimination or extreme forms of social exclusion.

We ask for the allocation of financial resources for the social inclusion of mobile EU citizens that are in need of support (e.g. through language training), as well as for managing mobility in the EU, providing information for potential migrants and cooperating between regions of origin and destination. Such resources can be provided by including EU citizens as one of the target groups of the European Integration Fund, and by allocating dedicated funding for the management of EU mobility. Cities have already developed pilots in managing EU mobility and cooperation, and are ready to share their experiences.

EUROCITIES contribution to the EU framework on Roma inclusion

EUROCITIES is ready to contribute to the implementation of the EU framework on Roma inclusion from a local perspective through a task force on Roma inclusion, which is chaired by the city of Ghent and involves cities from all parts of Europe. We offer our support in terms of providing expertise and data on local situations, policy developments and information on successful policies to help promoting the inclusion of Roma all over Europe.

The task force will engage in peer learning and exchanging good practices in partnership with the European Foundation Centre's Initiative 'Foundations for Roma Inclusion' and in close cooperation with local and European Roma organisations. We will also closely monitor the involvement of cities in the development of national strategies for Roma inclusion and report on results in early 2012.