

Monitoring on the National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020

Shadow Report 2015

Summary

This document is a summary of the document delivered to European Commission (EC) in the framework of consultation open to civil society on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (Strategy onwards), within the European Union framework for NRIS's of 2011¹.

Incongruence between the NRIS's objectives and the mainstream policies have been found. Not only in terms of current financial cutbacks, but in the approach of policy decisions. Even if Roma specific programmes are maintained and seem to be quite successful, an effective Roma inclusion requires mainstream policies aligned. Following we will give our vision on the advancements and regressions on the implementation of the Strategy during 2015, related to the priority areas that European Commission establishes in the Strategy. The structure of the shadow report that ONGs received is the same that Member States used on their report of the annual monitoring to be send to the European Commission.

The European Commission's framework for consultation on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies asks Member States the annual monitoring with an evaluation of the actions and implementation of the measures taken towards the goals proposed both annually and within the frame of 2020 objectives. Likewise, EC ask Civil Society organizations that work for Roma community a parallel monitoring, also called shadow report.

FSG made this report including the monitoring on key areas (education, employment, health and housing). Besides, this year the shadow report includes other areas as empowerment, child and women, funding, Antidiscrimination, Local Action, National Contact Point and transnational cooperation.

By areas:

EDUCATION

The Roma population continues to show the lowest rates of schooling and academic success in Spain, together with the highest rates of rejection and social exclusion. Notwithstanding significant advances in the past decades in terms of enrolment, Spanish Roma have not yet achieved the levels of formal education and qualification of the general population. In spite of very high enrolment rate in primary education, there remains an excessive level of absenteeism, but the main problems are the high rates of academic failure and early school leaving among Roma.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/eu-framework/index_en.htm

Maintenance of the financing of Roma specific educational programmes implemented by NGOs to compensate disadvantages.

The NRIS objectives and forecasts are unlikely to be fulfilled given current developments in public educational system. The extent of the public resources cuts have affected the educational promotion of Roma due to a reduction in the teacher body, increases in the teacher-student ratio in the classroom, and the disappearance of some programmes providing support to students with difficulties. Roma are negatively affected by the elimination or weakening of certain public school programmes serving to provide additional support to fight against early school leaving and to improve academic achievements.

EMPLOYMENT

In the current situation of labour market crisis, the job destruction has affected much more those with the lowest levels of employability, such as the Roma community, and especially temporary workers. Even if the unemployment rate in Spain is slowly decreasing, it reached 20,9% in 2015. The impact of this labour market crisis, together with the recent legal reform, has led to a general increase of temporary jobs and precariousness, which explains the generalisation of poverty in society.

The good news in this context is that the Roma specific programmes and investments for the promotion of their access to the labour market continued to be successful in terms of results. The Acceder programme, supported by ESF and national funds (Personal Income Tax Programme, IRPF) achieved in 2015 nearly 5,000 job contracts due to its long and consistent collaboration with key enterprises. In addition, it received a reallocation of ESF funds in 2015.

2014-2020 Spanish OPs were finally approved and it implies the continuation of the Acceder programme, which is the basic pillar to promote employment among Roma community, for the coming years.

The 2014-2020 OP for Youth Employment includes two projects with specific actions for young Roma.

The targets proposed in the Spanish NRIS regarding employment seem quite moderate, but the objectives will be very difficult to reach. Even if specific programmes seem to be quite successful, the general context of the labour market is adverse to include people with very low employability, such as the Roma, and specially for young people. All resources and opportunities launched to promote employment among young people are designed for those with a high profile in terms of academic success, keeping outside the system those who lack post-compulsory education, as it is the case of young Roma.

HEALTH

Overall, the National Health System (mainstreaming) adequately covers the needs in this area of Roma living in normalised situation, i.e. the majority. However, preventive actions are missing such as the promotion of health habits (as a result of the crisis and the impoverishment of families, malnourished children have been detected and there has been a rise in childhood obesity). Most of the calls for projects to promote the health of the Roma community have been eliminated, with the exception of the National Drug Plan and the National AIDS Plan.

Attention should be drawn to the "Study on health and the Roma community" conducted in 2014 and released in 2015, using the same methodology as the study done back in 2006.

Ever since the most recent reform of the health system, the Roma population from Eastern countries is finding it even more difficult to gain access to health care due to municipal registration barriers particularly affecting children who are sometimes denied health care. Another group facing difficulties are Roma families living in segregated settlements and that depend on social organisations to access public health. Since funding for social organisations has been cut, their access to health resources has suffered.

HOUSING

The overall housing situation in Spain has worsened considerably for all citizens as a result of the crisis. In the case of Roma families, in recent years we have observed an increase in squatters occupying empty flats, evictions and overcrowding. Another major problem is the deterioration of homes due to lack of maintenance, including public housing which is the responsibility of government administrations. A large proportion of Roma families live in public housing and the public administrations are responsible for maintenance which is not being done due to lack of public resources. Moreover, residential segregation and shanty towns specifically affecting Roma families persist.

In 2015, a process was launched to draw up a "Map-Study on Housing and the Roma Community" the data of which will be published in 2016. The aim of this process is to gain a deeper understanding of the situation of Roma families and also to assess progress vis-à-vis the map done in 2007.

We would note that in 2015 a call was launched for Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Development Strategies focusing on residential segregation, providing an opportunity to initiate improvements in segregated and run-down neighbourhoods.

Despite the persistence of shanty-town settlements in some cities, in recent years progress has been made in dismantling others (Madrid, Galicia, Segovia).

A major challenge is to align housing policies with the National Roma Integration Strategy. For example, the National Rehabilitation Plan (approved in 2013) includes relocation initiatives but makes no mention of the eradication of shanty towns, one of the priorities set out in the Strategy.

The possibility of financing housing through state funds is not clear with regard to shanty towns and sub-standard housing. Housing and urban development are the responsibility of regional and local governments and commitment and leadership at national level is poor. The lack of resources has led some public administrations to sell off their public housing to "vulture funds" (the case of Madrid) leaving many families, including Roma, unprotected. The lack of investment in public housing and its upkeep particularly affects Roma families.

FUNDING

Good news are the maintenance of the specific funds for Roma both at national level (mainly through IRPF), as European Funds (recently approved OP 2014-2020 including those specific for Roma)

These OP's include specific programs for Roma which are managed by Fundación Secretariado Gitano² since 1st of January 2016

² <http://www.gitanos.org/nuevospo/>

Programa Operativo de Inclusión Social y de la Economía Social (POISES):

- Proyecto ITINERARIOS (Acceder and Promociona)
- Proyecto IGUALDAD MUJERES GITANAS (Equality Roma Women)

Operational Program for Youth Employment (POEJ):

- Proyecto ITINERARIOS ACCEDER (Youth)
- Proyecto APRENDER TRABAJANDO (learning by doing program)

ANTIDISCRIMINATION

Discrimination against the Roma community in Spain is still occurring on a daily basis, directly influencing the social inclusion of this group in society. The social rejection of this minority is caused by prejudice and stereotypes. To make matters worse, the negative social image of this community has been reinforced by television programmes broadcast in prime time ridiculing the Roma community. We would also draw attention to the disconcerting level of discrimination and anti-Gypsyism on the Internet making this one of the areas where swift and effective action is needed given the high social profile of this media.

Progress in this area includes the creation of hate crime and discrimination offices in public prosecution services, police protocols (Ministry of the Interior) and renewal of the assistance service for victims of discrimination as an exemplary mechanism in the partnership between the Council and civil society (although it does not envisage litigation).

The main challenges are to promote the equality body, i.e. the Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination (paralysed for the time being); promote awareness-raising initiatives to encourage victims to report incidents of discrimination, which means that they must be informed and an effective system put in place to protect their rights; enact a Comprehensive Equality Act; enforce anti-discrimination law in the courts and; enhance coordination on the part of key players: police, prosecutors, lawyers and civil society.

CHILDREN AND WOMEN

The crisis and policy measures that have been taken in recent years have especially affected children (Roma not an exception) in the areas of education (decreased funding to support diversity, lunch subsidies, book subsidies, etc.), health (especially in the case of Roma children from Eastern countries left without health care) and socio-educational resources.

The 2015-2017 Comprehensive Family Support Plan was approved in May 2015. This was the first plan of its kind in Spain and was conceived to provide comprehensive support to families: social and economic protection, reconciliation of work and family and co-responsibility, maternity support and the creation of an enabling environment for family life, positive parenting, support for families with special needs, etc. This approach is positive insofar as it reinforces coordination, cooperation and cross-cutting support for families; and while it does not explicitly mention Roma families, they are included.

The big challenge is how to address poverty which has spread to many layers of society and how to mitigate its impact on children, especially Roma children who lack the resources needed for socio-educational inclusion.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Poverty has spread, partly due to the rise in unemployment and job insecurity, but also because the criteria and procedures in place to apply for minimum income schemes have become more restrictive and the amounts of such income have decreased. These factors affect the whole population but are magnified when it comes to groups living in extreme social vulnerability such as Roma families. The child poverty rate of Spanish households is among the highest in Europe and this increases the risk of perpetuating poverty from one generation to the next. Also, poverty has become increasingly feminised. There has been an increase in the number of aid applications to help pay for basic utilities (water, electricity, heating, i.e. energy poverty) and especially to make rent and mortgage payments.

The disappearance or merging of social service centers and training and employment resources makes it more difficult for the most vulnerable sector of the population, such as the Roma community, to gain access to these.

A process is under way whereby poverty and exclusion are increasingly concentrated in certain neighbourhoods or areas leading to problems of coexistence and social exclusion particularly affecting Roma families. Young people are the group most affected by this process of exclusion as evidenced by their low expectations.

EMPOWERMENT

The implementation of the Strategy has not made headway in terms of the empowerment or capacity building of the Roma associative movement or the Roma community. The activities being carried out are either a continuation of the programmes already under way or one-off efforts lacking any sort of strategic vision.

The training programme conducted by the Public University of Navarre offering scholarships for young Roma to do a degree in "social intervention with the Roma community" remains in operation. Support has also continued for the youth programme promoting coexistence and values of solidarity among young people, especially young Roma. In 2015 a specific course was given for Roma on the concept of "Interculturalism" and the promotion of intercultural values. Finally, the NRCP offered the Roma organisations a working seminar on "The use of the Structural Funds"

The main challenge is the lack of capacities of the Roma associative movement, especially at local level, to promote the empowerment of the Roma community as a whole.

LOCAL ACTION

In May 2015 regional and municipal elections were held and this brought about change in many governments. We are therefore immersed in a situation where we need to bring new governments on board to meet the commitments of the National Strategy.

In general, regional and local governments were receptive to keeping the commitments made in terms of financial support and activities designed to improve the social inclusion of the Roma community. Driven by some organisations of the Roma associative movement, several regions have publicly expressed their willingness to transfer the commitments of the National Strategy to a Regional Roma Inclusion Strategy.

Moreover, some of the regions (autonomous communities) have incorporated activities specifically targeting the Roma Community in their recently adopted regional OPs by way of

Investment Priority 9.2. or the inclusion of specific measures in other priorities. In other words, regions are increasingly becoming aware of the value of the Structural Funds to support the social inclusion of the Roma community.

Despite the desire to develop regional strategies in the near future, the policy measures implemented up to now at local and regional level are not aligned with the objectives of the National Strategy. The National Contact Point has been unsuccessful in bringing regions and municipalities on board or to lead the process of developing regional strategies.

NATIONAL ROMA CONTACT POINT (NRCP)

The NRCP is very limited in its capacities to take decisions. However it is consulted formally, it doesn't have the capacity to influence the development of the policies and it's not included in the decisions on funding, with an exception on referring to European Funds.

It is absolutely outside the decision-making process regarding funding, except the recent involvement in European Funds.

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Spain has supported EURoma Network³ during the 2007-2013 Programming Period. The approval of the 2014-2020 Operational Period for the Social Inclusion and Social Economy allows the continuation of the Network for the following years. This Network has stimulated the training, information exchange, good practices and the contact between European Funds managing authorities on 12 Member States to promote the use of Structural Funds in programs for the Roma Inclusion.

³ www.euromanet.eu